



# CUDDY *of the* WHITE TOPS

Earl Chapin May



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CUDDY  
OF THE WHITE TOPS  

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EARL CHAPIN MAY







HE BEHELD HIS CIRCUS SPREAD OUT BEFORE HIM.

# CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS

BY  
EARL CHAPIN MAY

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
NEW YORK :: 1924 :: LONDON

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JUN 19 '24

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER  
JOSIAH MONROE MAY  
WHO LOVED A CLEAN SHOW BE-  
CAUSE HE WAS A GOOD SHOWMAN



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. OUT OF COLLEGE . . . . .	1
II. A CIRCUS GIRL . . . . .	9
III. THE CIRCUS CLEM . . . . .	22
IV. MARION GIVES ADVICE . . . . .	33
V. AMONG THE GRIFTERS . . . . .	47
VI. THE FIXING OF FRAZIER . . . . .	56
VII. A BLOW-OFF . . . . .	66
VIII. THE BLOW-DOWN . . . . .	86
IX. THE BLOW-UP . . . . .	91
X. OUT OF THE MUD . . . . .	100
XI. THE BIG SQUEEZE . . . . .	113
XII. CUDDY SEES MARJORIE . . . . .	136
XIII. MANSON AND MARION . . . . .	153
XIV. CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW . . . . .	166
XV. TWO—AND A COTTAGE . . . . .	191
XVI. CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT . . . . .	199
XVII. A BAD BULL LAMS . . . . .	213
XVIII. CUDDY IS UNMASKED . . . . .	233
XIX. MARJORIE MEETS MARION . . . . .	248
XX. THE GREAT DECISION . . . . .	263





# CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS

## I

### OUT OF COLLEGE

**A**T THE end of a hard half hour in a stuffy New York office, Clarence Cuddington Cotter heard his guardian uncle pronounce this sentence:

“As executor of your father’s estate I now present you, Cuddy, with a circus—nothing more.”

Nathaniel Cotter, in his grimly legal way, straightened the pile of papers before him, and squinted at his nephew, just come into his majority. Cuddy stared across the pile of law books, his broad brows puckered over his clear blue eyes, his shining brown hair sadly rumpled, his well-manicured hands plucking at the table top. His Uncle Ned had rudely tumbled Cuddy’s house of cards, and Cuddy, senior in Columbus College, was rather dazed.

“That’s all—that’s—left—for—me?” he asked.

“That’s all, my boy. Now, what to do?” The lawyer studied Cuddy.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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The object of this scrutiny gazed fixedly at the ink-stained table. His chin rested on his chest, his shoulders sloped, his body slumped, he was lost in a roaring wilderness of thought.

"All over with my college days," the thought winds roared. "All over with Marjorie—my Marjorie with her olive skin, deep dark eyes, silky black hair, her softly curving neck, and the carriage of a queen. I'm down and out, buried by a circus! Who ever would have thought of that. A circus! None of my crowd must ever know. A circus! And all my very own! Of all the funny flops of fate. My own! And I'm just twenty-one. My own! A circus!"

His full, good-natured mouth became a thin red line. His strong jaws tightened. His head came up. He breathed defiance at his Uncle Ned and at the wide, wide world. He banged his fists upon the table until the inkstands did a dance.

"All right," he snapped. "I'm game. Of course I can run a circus."

"Know anything about business?" his uncle asked.

"Not much," admitted Cuddy, his blue eyes steadily on his uncle.

"Know anything about the circus business?"

"I've seen lots of them. Saw one at Columbus College just the other day."

"Think you can run one?" Uncle Ned tapped the table with speculative pencil, and watched the well-built boy before him.

"Of course. Why not? Me and Barnum. Sure."

"Circus life is pretty rough, so I am told." Uncle Ned spoke with judicial caution. "Circus people are, you know, rather—elemental."

"I know. I had a row with some last week. But that doesn't scare me. I think it would be great to run my circus!" Cuddy chanted on.

"What did you learn during your four years in college?" Uncle Ned became the trial lawyer. He was familiar with Cuddy's case.

"Oh, quite a lot." Cuddy smoothed his brown and shining hair.

"And what did you learn during your three summers in Europe, between your—ah—hem—laborious college years?"

"A lot." Cuddy tucked a blue 'kerchief in his right cuff.

"Do anything in athletics? You're big enough to do something."

"Teas, tennis and golf, mostly. I went in for dramatics, too."

"They should help you in the circus business." Uncle Ned smiled sarcastically at his orphaned nephew.

"I'm young and healthy and fairly bright," was Cuddy's indignant answer as he blew cigarette smoke toward the ceiling.

Uncle Ned heard this statement without comment.

"You'll admit I must have some stuff in me," Cuddy continued. "You bring me down from college just before my commencement, calmly announce that I am

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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the only heir to a circus and nothing else, then ask me what I'm going to do about it. My answer is that I'm going to run it."

"I find no fault with your declaration," said Uncle Ned.

"I mean it." Cuddy was combative. "But I'd like to know how my father, a banker, a churchman, could have sunk one hundred and fifty thousand dollars—all the family money—in a traveling circus. He never went near one."

"That's the answer," said Uncle Ned. "Calkins, the showman, talked your banker father into loaning him ten thousand dollars with Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities, and Free Horse Fair as security. It was to be a fifty-fifty deal. Your father and Calkins were to share in a partnership profit. Before your father finished throwing good money after bad, he had invested one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in a circus for which he had a bill of sale he did not want. Your father died two years ago, leaving me as your guardian. You, as the only surviving heir, inherited the circus when you became twenty-one. It's very simple. Sorry I could not have told you before."

"But was there no other property or money?"

"That all went for your education, or whatever you want to call it." The lawyer smiled grimly at the college senior.

"So I've got to run this circus or hunt some other job?"



## OUT OF COLLEGE

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"That's about it, Cuddy. That seems to be your only prospect."

"Then me for the circus." Cuddy squared his well-tailored shoulders.

"Any money left from your allowance?"

"About five hundred dollars in my college checking account." He looked at his bright tan shoes.

Uncle Ned felt just a little sorry for the half-baked chap.

"Life's been pretty soft for you, Cuddy."

"I guess so, sir." He lighted a fresh cigarette.

"But you've had lots of experience in life?"

"Sure. College and Europe and all that."

"You're about to have some real thrills, my boy," said testy Uncle Ned. He pushed a bundle of papers across the table. "There's your bill of sale for the Calkins Circus, etc., and a route list showing where the circus is supposed to be from day to day, and a letter from me introducing you to Calkins. You're on your own now. Good-by, and good luck." Uncle and nephew shook hands.

Cuddy tumbled into the jam of John Street and breathed deeply.

"Gee! I hope Uncle Ned didn't see how hard I hit the ground when he kicked the props from under me. Wonder why dear old dad didn't give me some warning of what was coming? Left me sailing smoothly through college with all the money I wanted, then, bingo! I'm on the world. If I'd only known this when dad died two years ago."



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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He hailed a taxi and rolled up Broadway.

"Thank my lucky stars dad didn't leave me a sausage factory. Hope there are elephants with Calkins' circus. Don't so much mind quitting college, but it will hurt to say farewell to Marjorie." His spirits sank at thought of Marjorie Dawson Trent, dark, statuesque, entrancing. His lovely college fiancée.

Cuddy stepped into his Fortieth Street college club. There were fellows just running into town from college, fellows just getting ready to run back to college. College trophies and pennants shared wall space with photographs of distinguished collegians who had become national presidents, bank presidents, railroad presidents, college presidents. The array was discouraging to Cuddy. "I'll never get in that bunch now—not even if I get to be president of a circus," he reflected rather bitterly. Then he tried to laugh at the ghastly joke, failed dismally, and, wandering into the writing room, wrote this valedictory:

"DEAREST, DEAREST MARJORIE:

"When I showed you the summons from Uncle Ned and we parted in our favorite nook overlooking the lake, I little thought I was really saying good-by to you and to college and to all the things which have made life so wonderful for me during the two years I've known you. But Uncle Ned gave me the kind of birthday party that only a lawyer could. When he got through with me I had nothing left in life but the necessity of hunting for a job and hunting it in a hurry. If I write a little jumbly it is because the blow really stunned me, a little. Fate is fate. I've always believed I could face any situation that faced

## OUT OF COLLEGE

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me. But I never thought of a situation that would take you out of my life. Putting it briefly and brutally, I'm broke. That's something that neither of us figured on. But, being broke, and not knowing when I shall be anything else, I can do nothing, in fairness to you, whom I love better than anything else in life, but release you from our engagement. Perhaps if I were merely broke I would not even do you that kindness. I would be tempted to ask you to wait for me, or something like that. But I'm quite a little more than broke. I'm sent upon a great adventure. I'm not afraid of it. Perhaps, in spite of the pain it brings me, I welcome it. Perhaps I welcome it because I must. Anyhow, it's an adventure which I cannot tell you about. I'm sorry I must be so mysterious, but I must. If I come back from it, successfully, I am going to look for you. Until then I have no right to ask you to wait for me. And I can't explain anything to you or to anybody else. I am asking the fellows in my fraternity to send my things home, and I'm asking Orton Burch to take you to the Spring Formal for me. I hope you will accept Orton as my substitute. I hope you will forgive me for merely writing to you when I should come back and tell you all about it. But I cannot do that. Some day you will understand. Until then and for all time to come, I love you, love you, love you.

"CUDDY."

Cuddy gulped as he sealed the note and stepped into the street. He was passing his hand over his eyes when Slat's Murphy slapped him jovially on the back with, "Hello, Cuddy; going back to Columbus with me to-night? About time to buck up for spring exams."

Cuddy kept his head down, searching for a stamp in his pocketbook. Just his luck to meet, of all persons,

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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the hateful, frog-eyed, slab-sided Murphy of the ultra offensive Rho Epsilons.

"Got to cut college for a day or so," he said. "Got some business down south." He dropped the note into a mail box.

Slats laughed uproariously at that. He had a vicious laugh.

"Business!" he shouted. "Business! You never had any business in your life. Business! Wait until I tell that story to the crowd at college. Ho, ho!" he roared. "I'll tell it to Marjorie first."

"Nevertheless, I've got business now, plenty of it," Cuddy answered with dignity as he turned his back on his despised college rival, hailed a taxi and sped for a southbound train, leaving Murphy agape.

Cuddy was off on his great adventure.

## II

### A CIRCUS GIRL

**A**T NINE the next morning Cuddy reached Roanoke, Virginia, checked his bag in the station, sauntered over to a train of yellow cars liberally lettered "CALKINS' CIRCUS," and addressed a soiled and weary workman.

"Where will I find Mr. Calkins?" he asked.

"Reckon you'll find the Guv'ner on the lot," answered the razorback as he swung his pull-up team around and headed it for the loading runs at the end of the flat cars.

"What's the lot?" Cuddy asked.

"The showgrounds."

"Where are they?"

"About a half mile up toward town. Follow that menagerie wagon."

Cuddy hit the dusty trail behind a cage of lions. One of them looked with friendly eye through the barred breathing hole in the rear wall of the cage. Cuddy, trudging in the dust, returned the friendly glance.

"I'm your new boss, old-timer," he said to the king of beasts.

The lion roared in response. "Sounds as if you re



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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hungry," said Cuddy cheerfully. He greeted with joy the cat animal odor. His ears saluted the unmistakable rumble of the rainbow-tinted wheels as they rolled on-to hard pavement. He caught up with the cage and turned back the canvas cover to feast his eyes on red paint and gold leaf thus revealed. "Mine! All mine!" thought Cuddy. A lash stung him on the back and a gruff voice from the driver's seat growled: "Get the hell out of there!"

Cuddy, from the vantage of the sidewalk, raised his voice to the wagon driver.

"I'm owner of this show," he announced.

The driver spat carelessly and profusely. "Tell that to Guv'ner Calkins," he answered with a grin. "And stay away from those cat animals. Want to get an arm clawed off?"

A moment later Cuddy forgot his injured feelings, for he topped a hill that overlooked the lot and beheld his circus spread out before him in all the glory of its daily setting-up. Troops of horses, companies of men, marched and countermarched over the fresh spring grass. Hustling circus youths were stripping canvas covers from the carved and bright-hued tableau wagons. Some one was tentatively touching the keyboard of the ear-piercing calliope. Resplendent women and gallant men were emerging from the smaller tents and mounting richly caparisoned steeds, preparatory to the street parade. Circus employees were placing plumes on the heads of the dapple grays assigned to draw the gorgeous wagons. The creaking of pulleys



## *A CIRCUS GIRL*

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could be heard on the hilltop as the great center poles of the main circus tent were hauled into upright position, a bright banner floating from the top of each.

The showman's Field of the Cloth of Gold was being prepared for the daily tournament with time, space, the elements and human nature. Cuddy's eyes had never seen a more stirring picture. He hastened down the hill to take possession of his circus.

"Gangway," yelled two husky canvasmen as they shouldered an iron-tipped hickory quarter-pole and propelled it rapidly past Cuddy's dodging head. The pole was six inches thick and twenty feet long. Cuddy estimated those dimensions as he stooped to pick up his hat.

"Hi, there! Want to get stepped on by something heavy?" snapped an unshaved elephant trainer as he led his herd of hungry-looking "bulls" across the spot where Cuddy had just stood. Having leaped to safety with ballroom agility, Cuddy retreated to the rear of a red, muddy wagon bearing the legend: "No. 2. Blue Seats."

"Hi, Towner! Want to get your block knocked off?"

Cuddy glanced over his shoulder just as a dozen blue seat-planks shot out of the wagon, soared over his head and slapped on the ground at his feet. Cuddy promptly moved again. He had seen circuses many times. But now he was alone on the lot at the hectic hour of setting-up. So, as he moved, he moved in foreign fields.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Don't mix up them bale rings," barked an uncouth hybrid as Cuddy stumbled among the hardware, ropes, and tent pins scattered around a wagon labeled "No. 60. Stake and Chain." Cuddy leaped awkwardly out of that tangle and almost under the feet of an eight-horse team swinging sharply around to "spot" a huge wagon filled with muddy canvas. Cuddy stumbled to one side, and collided with a slender, swarthy, hook-nosed individual who swore viciously. Cuddy paused to catch his breath.

"Where can I find Mr. Calkins?" he asked his inhospitable host.

The swarthy man pulled a toothpick from his mouth, lighted a cigar, blew a cloud of smoke through a black mustache, coolly studied Cuddy, spat and replied:

"You mean the Guv'ner?"

"I mean Mr. Calkins, manager of this show," replied Cuddy.

"That's the same," replied the swarthy man as he tipped his derby hat to the back of his head, put his hands in his trousers pockets, and looked along his ample vest front where hung a massive gold chain adorned with various fobs and pendants.

"I want to see him," explained Cuddy.

"He's not on the show to-day," the swarthy man answered, again giving Cuddy a careful once-over.

"I have a letter to him," persisted Cuddy.

"Tell you what you do," said the swarthy man, after an instant's hesitation. "You go over to that marquee

## *A CIRCUS GIRL*

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there—that red tent that says ‘Main Entrance’ on it—and ask for Colonel Boone.”

Cuddy followed directions.

After being nearly brained by an octet of negroes, driving a tent stake into the resisting ground with many a “whuff” and grunt, Cuddy reached his objective.

A bald-headed man in shirt sleeves was counting pasteboard tickets behind a tall red box.

“Is Colonel Boone here?” demanded Cuddy. The pangs of hunger due to unwonted exercise on a breakfastless morning made him more persistent in his quest.

The bald-headed man finished counting his tickets.

“Who did you say?” he finally asked.

“Colonel Boone,” Cuddy repeated.

“Not on the front door,” replied the bald-headed man and began to count more pasteboards.

“Where will I find him?” demanded Cuddy.

“Try the cookhouse,” answered the ticket counter.

“Where’s the cookhouse?” Cuddy queried.

The bald-headed man nodded casually toward the east.

Cuddy sidestepped more gangs of sweating negroes who bore great bales of loosely rolled canvas from wagons to stake rows. He miraculously escaped the heels of horses driven in all directions and apparently without purpose. He almost trod on some burning mantles at the side of the wagon marked “Chandelier.” In time he found the cookhouse largely by following his nose.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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A man collecting meal tickets stopped him at the entrance.

"I want to see Colonel Boone," explained Cuddy, now feeling badly fagged and out of the picture.

"He'll be here in just a minute," the door tender answered. "We got in this town late to-day. Got away from yesterday's town late last night. Breakfast's late. When Colonel Boone comes out, I'll tell you."

"Where was the circus yesterday?" inquired Cuddy, by way of beguiling the time and forgetting his hunger.

The cookhouse doorman gave him a quick appraisal.

"Can't say," he replied.

Cuddy pondered on this answer for a minute. Then a stocky, round-faced man came out carrying a monstrous and highly inflamed cigar.

"This gentleman wants to see you, Colonel," said the doorman, indicating Cuddy. The Colonel stared at him.

"Are you Colonel Boone?" inquired Cuddy after a protracted pause.

"That's what they call me," responded the stocky individual from behind his cigar.

"I am looking for Mr. Calkins," explained Cuddy.

"Who told you to ask for him?" demanded the stocky one.

Cuddy described his first-found guide.

"Guv'ner Calkins is not on the lot," replied Colonel Boone.



"But I have a very special message to him," said Cuddy.

"What's your name?" demanded the Colonel.

"Clarence Cuddington Cotter," answered Cuddy.

Colonel Boone searched his pockets, discovered a sheaf of folded telegrams, drew one out, read it carefully, looked at Cuddy with great interest and said: "Are you from attorney Nathaniel Cotter of New York?"

"I am," said Cuddy.

"Got anything to identify you?"

"Here's a letter introducing me to Mr. Calkins."

Colonel Boone read it.

"Got any other papers?" he continued.

"I have," Cuddy answered.

"Let's see 'em," demanded the Colonel.

"I have a bill of sale for this circus in my pocket," said Cuddy stubbornly, tapping his breast significantly.

"That's all right, son," answered Colonel Boone warmly. "Come into the cookhouse and have breakfast. I'm Guv'ner Calkins."

While Cuddy sat on a blue seat-plank at a broad board table and ate his ham and eggs from granite-ware which slid readily about on oilcloth table covers, Guv'ner Calkins explained matters of moment.

"You see, it's this way, son. I've had a lot of hard luck since your dad began putting money into this show and I'm having mighty hard luck right now. The show business isn't what it used to be, what with feed, lot and license costing more every day, the railroads

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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charging twice what they used to and so many carnival companies copping the public's money and making 'em sore at their grift and their girl shows. Why, right here in Virginia we have to pay state, county and city licenses every time we show. Other southern states are 'bout as bad. So I've been losing money ever since we opened at Mobile, March 3. I was a sucker to open so early and to figure on getting any spring money out of the cotton country, but I had to work north on some route.

"Now the show's about to blow up. I've moved it the last few days by letting certain officers of the law travel with us. They represent claims. You see two of them over at that table eating their heads, and mine, off. You didn't bring any money with you, son?"

"Not much," admitted Cuddy.

Guv'ner Calkins seemed disconcerted.

"That's bad," he assured Cuddy. "Danville was a bloomer yesterday and business was just as rotten at Greensboro. Unless we get a good day here, you're going to see a show blow up that cost your father one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, not countin' interest, and that's worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars as she stands on the lot. It's the best fifteen-car show in the business, that's what it is."

A little rat-faced fellow rushed into the dining tent, and whispered in Calkins' ear. From a near-by tent came sounds suggesting battle.

"Got to go now. Somethin' most important," Calkins explained. "You'll find me around the front door



## *A CIRCUS GIRL*

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or in the ticket wagon. But don't ask for me by name. Folks usually address me as 'Colonel Boone.' That's a matter of precaution. You'll soon see why." He got to his feet, and paused while a slender girl glided into the cookhouse. She had golden hair and deep blue eyes. She seated herself opposite Cuddy.

"Mr. Cotter, meet Miss Marion Fortescue, Queen of the Arena," said Calkins, casually, and ducked under the sidewall nearest the noisy combat.

"How do you do?" she inquired, softly.

With mind on Marjorie Trent, Cuddy gazed at the new arrival.

"When did you come on the show? When did you join out? I did not see you on the lot at the last stand." Miss Fortescue was trying to make conversation.

"I just arrived this morning, Miss Fortescue," he answered.

"You're not a regular trouper," she remarked, "not a professional."

"I'm afraid not. This is my first appearance in a circus dining room," he admitted with dignity. "But how could you tell that?"

"Any trouper can identify a towner—a non-professional—without looking twice," she announced. "You rarely see a showman wearing clothes like yours on a circus lot." She smiled.

Cuddy colored vividly. He had always prided himself on being strictly in the mode. Now he feared a

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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circus girl was laughing at him. The girl had remarkably white teeth.

"Please don't be offended," she hastened to say. "Plenty of us show people would like to dress in style, but that is rather difficult when we are packed into Pullmans two in a berth, two berths high every night and live under canvas or in the open every day, rain or shine."

Cuddy gave silent assent. Miss Fortescue toyed gracefully with her ham and eggs. She lightly lifted a huge coffee cup in one pink and pliant hand.

"I wear gloves nearly all the time. That's one of my vanities," she explained.

Cuddy again colored, at this unexpected answer to his unasked question.

She pushed back her hair of Tuscan gold, thus bringing into view a fascinating forearm.

"I'm the new owner," said Cuddy.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Fortescue.

"I'm the new owner of this show," said Cuddy, a little louder.

Miss Fortescue was incredulous, then sympathetic. Cuddy felt the need of sympathy just then. He hastily sketched his story and exhibited his bill of sale. Then he tucked the bill back in his inside coat pocket. She was really a very nice girl. She seemed quite agitated at Cuddy's revelation. She mopped her dewy face and throat with a frankly cotton handkerchief. Her porcelain pink complexion remained unchanged. "It is her own!" marveled Cuddy.

"And what do you do with the show?" Cuddy asked her.

"About what the usual performer does on the usual small show," she answered. "Of course I'm not a 'Queen of the Arena.' That's Guv'ner Calkins' idea of humor. And he thinks a title may turn away wrath. He owes me and other performers in the dressing room four weeks' salaries. He would owe less if he kept his show clean—kept the grifters away."

"But what do you do with the show?" insisted Cuddy.

"Well, not so very much when you come to think of it," she confessed. "I usually finish breakfast at nine o'clock if the cookhouse is up on time. We're late to-day. Then I dress for parade and ride that, with a team of tandem whites, until about eleven, depending on how long the parade route is. Then I get my ring costumes out of the trunk. Yes," she anticipated his question, "I only have one trunk, regulation size, 24 by 18 by 18 inches, you know. That's all each performer is allowed to carry. Then I have dinner and go back to the dressing room and do some washing and mending if the sun's out. At 2:15 I ride entry—the 'walk-around' the hippodrome track. During the afternoon show I do a wire act, a butterfly act, a high school act, work the bulls—elephants, you know—and act as somersault flier in the return act. Then I have supper, finish my mending, go through the night show and hunt for the car and berth in the railroad yards. That's all."

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Rather a hard life," said Cuddy.

"Not very," replied Miss Fortescue, folding her paper napkin. "Much easier than being a stenographer or school teacher, for instance."

The noise from the neighboring tent increased.

"What's all that row Mr. Calkins is attending?" Cuddy asked her.

"Oh, that's just a clem," she said. "We have lots of them."

"What's a clem?"

"A rough house. Usually between show folks and towners. Better stay away from them," warned the circus girl.

"How long have you been traveling with a circus?" Cuddy resumed.

"I've been in the profession, let's see, yes, this is my tenth season."

"But you don't travel all the year long?"

"Lord, no!" she exclaimed. "This show generally opens the season in Florida or Alabama about the middle of March and closes in Texas or Louisiana early in December. That's a long circus season, about thirty-four weeks. Most shows only run—stay out—about twenty-five weeks. It's the long season that keeps so many of us on this show in spite of the rotten grift the Guv'ner carries."

"What do you do when the show isn't running? I mean, when it isn't staying out?" asked Cuddy, offering a cigarette which the girl declined.

"Oh, I usually live at winter quarters and break in



## A CIRCUS GIRL

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new animal acts. This is my first season working the bulls. I helped break in a new cat animal act last winter, but haven't worked them under canvas, yet. Excuse me, there's the last bugle for the parade."

Miss Fortescue prepared to take her leave. It is no easy thing to swing around on a narrow blue plank, lift one's feet and legs over the same, touch *terra firma* and move off in complete grace and a gingham gown. Miss Fortescue did it, easily and without self-consciousness. She waved one hand in adieu and disappeared through the cookhouse door.

Shifting his seat Cuddy watched her deftly pick her dainty way across the tangled circus lot—until she met a sizable man in cavalier costume. Hand in hand girl and cavalier mingled with the maze of horses, performers, elephants and tableau wagons preparing for the morning street parade.

Cuddy stepped into the sunshine, halted a canvasman, indicated the disappearing couple and asked: "Who is the big fellow?"

"That's Mr. Manson, the equestrian director. He runs the performance." The canvasman bent his steps toward the stake and chain wagon, adding, "Big fellow's right. Better not get in wrong with him."

"Evidently Manson is a person of some importance," commented Cuddy as he went in search of Calkins. That gentleman was discovered counting popcorn bricks in a candy stand, as calmly as if he had not recently stilled a tumult.

### III

#### THE CIRCUS CLEM

“**A**H, my young friend,” exclaimed the circus manager, “I was just this moment thinking of you. We will continue our confidential talk.” He beamed on Cuddy. Then he proceeded to furnish the talk while Cuddy furnished the confidence.

“I reckon you’re the owner of this show,” Calkins began with great exhibition of good will. “Your uncle wired me you were coming. Said he had turned the bill of sale over to you. I admit the legality of that bill. I made it out myself and your uncle saw that I made it out proper. Pretty soon I’ll take you around the lot and introduce you to the company as the new owner.

“And I want to give you two friendly tips. If you haven’t got a bank roll to put back of this show, don’t tip it off to any one. And don’t interfere with the grift. I thought you would come here with at least ten thousand dollars. I tipped it off to some of the troupe that you would. See? Well. You gotta make good on the bluff. And we, this show, has got to get enough money to move. If we don’t get it through



the ticket wagon and on the seats, we get it some other way. Savvy?"

"What do you call 'the grift'?" asked Cuddy.

"Very simple," said Calkins. "It costs about two thousand seven hundred dollars a day to run this show. That's called 'the nut.' You might get two sell-outs in one day, work off 'the nut' and roll out of that town with three thousand five hundred dollars' clear profit. Then you might run into four days of rain and not take in more than seven hundred dollars a day. In those four days you lose two thousand dollars a day or eight thousand dollars in four days. Counting your one big sell-out day, you're still four thousand five hundred dollars in the hole. Get me? For one day where you work off the nut and have some good jack to take out of your ticket wagon and put into bank drafts to send back home you run into four days where you have to pay out two thousand dollars more each day than you take in. And the insurance company's weather policy on a circus comes too high when a show travels twelve to fourteen thousand miles in a season and sets up in a new town each day. I got to carry the grift, or graft as the towners call it, to help pay expenses."

"Sol Goldman has charge of the grift on this show. Come into the ticket wagon where he can explain the whole thing to you."

Mr. Goldman proved to be the swarthy man of the early morning. He was all affability upon their second meeting.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Aw, Meester Cotter, I am so delighted to have met you!" he exclaimed, as they entered the tiny business office in the rear of the ticket wagon opposite the ticket seller's window. "You did not tell me you were the great Meester Cotter when we have met this morning. Then it would have been my great pleasure to have introduce you to the Guv'ner. But we of this profession must be careful." He leered at Calkins. "We have many enemies. The officers are always trying to, as you say, shake us down. It is hard for a gentleman to make a living these days. We must use great skill in our games of chance."

Cuddy glanced at a young fellow near the ticket window.

"Oh, don't mind him," remarked Calkins. "That's 'Rony' Gavin, our treasurer. He knows everything. Meet Mr. Gavin, Mr. Cotter."

Cuddy and Rony shook hands. Cuddy liked Rony's grip.

"You see, it's this way," Calkins went on, as he drew the trio close together. "Sol Goldman, here, has eleven grifters with him. They work games and also short change the rubes or simps. On a fair day the grift takes in two thousand dollars. I deduct the money I pay out for fixing, then me and Goldman divide the net. He pays his grifters. I pocket my half." Calkins tapped Cuddy's knee with a stubby forefinger.

Cuddy nodded foggily. He half rose as he heard the distant circus band on parade. The small boy

## THE CIRCUS CLEM

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struggled with the business man—then the business man sat down.

"The nine hundred dollars or so a day I get from the grift keeps the show going. Especially when business is bad. The towners are looking for the grift—and we give it to 'em. Do you get me?" concluded Calkins.

"I get you," responded Cuddy with disgust. "But supposing some of the e-er towners who lose their money to Mr. Goldman or his assistants should complain to the authorities?"

"In that case," replied Goldman, "the authorities do not hear them. Or we compromise by throwing back some of the squawkers' losses or we run the squawkers off the lot."

"And if they do not run readily?" suggested Cuddy.

"There is always the handy tent stake," was Mr. Goldman's answer.

Cuddy permitted himself a slight shudder.

"Do all circuses carry these e-e-er games of chance?" he asked with an attempt at sarcasm.

"Not all of 'em," Calkins admitted. "But it's part of our business. Of course, before the grifters work we always have the authorities fixed. Fatty Frazier fixes for us."

"And now, my dear friend, Meester Cotter," concluded Goldman, laying one paw lightly on young Cuddy's arm, "you will see that me and my associates are quite an important part of the circus. You, as the new owner, will not, however, have to bother about

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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us. We do not work unless all matters have been arranged with the authorities. There will be no trouble, I can assure you."

The thin, swarthy Goldman and the fat, rubicund Calkins climbed through the door of the ticket wagon and left the new circus proprietor to his thoughts.

"That simp will give no trouble," said Calkins to Goldman.

"Has he got any jack?" said Goldman to Calkins.

"I'm afraid not," Calkins admitted.

"Then run him off the show," the grifter urged.

"How about his bill of sale for the show?" Calkins remonstrated.

"Get that before he starts to run," Goldman muttered.

"You handle that part of it," said Calkins.

The negro side show band burst into a blare of brasses. Old Doc Inman began his bally-hoo in front of the gaudy banners. The "towners" who had followed the parade to the lot began to buy tickets at twenty-five cents each and to enter the Museum of Monstrosities.

Inside the covered ticket wagon young Cuddy sat absorbed in thought. "It's up to you," he kept hearing his uncle say. He wondered whether Uncle Ned knew as much about the Calkins circus as he had learned in four well-filled hours. He wondered, too, if Uncle Ned or any of the showmen he had met that day knew how little he knew about the world of business in general and about the circus business in par-



## THE CIRCUS CLEM

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ticular. Then he raised his head to find Rony Gavin, circus treasurer and ticket seller, looking at him quizzically.

"Rony," said Cuddy, "you heard this three-way conversation just now. You know everything about the financial end of this circus business, don't you?"

"I should say I do," replied Rony. "I've been in a circus ticket wagon six seasons now. I handle all the money and pay all the bills."

"Do you handle the grift money, too?"

"The show's part of it, after Guv'ner Calkins turns it over to me."

"If it's a fair question, Rony, what salary do you get?"

"I don't get any. I get half the walk-a-way."

"What's the walk-away, Rony?"

"The change the ticket buyers don't take with them," answered Rony.

"Pretty good job, Rony?"

"I own a quarter-section farm in central Kansas," answered the cheerful treasurer.

"Think the walk-away idea is all right, Rony?"

"The towners seldom miss it. If they do and make a squawk, I give it back," said Rony.

Cuddy went out in the open to do some more thinking. He thought during the dinner hour while, in Calkins' company, he ate his noon-day soup, steak, potatoes, white bread, canned corn, apple pie and coffee.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"How many in this dining tent?" Cuddy queried to Calkins.

"We feed about two hundred on the lot," the showman said.

"All eat the same?"

"From rough-neck to manager, we all get the same cookhouse grub," Calkins assured him. "That's one of the things that keeps this show together."

"Any of Goldman's grifters in the dining tent?"

"They sleep on the train, but they never eat on the lot. They stay clear away from the show unless they're working. They're not supposed to be with it."

"If they come around to-day I'd like to look them over," suggested the fledgling circus proprietor.

"Glad to point them out to you," mumbled Calkins, his mouth full of meat. "Looks like we might get some easy money in this burg."

"How can the grifters work with sheriffs and police from other towns traveling with us?" ventured Cuddy.

"We fix them the same as we do the local officials," Calkins answered. Then he added: "You'll learn a heap more on the road than you ever learned in college. It'll be what you might call a liberal education. You're getting kind of wise already, eh, son? About that money of yours, now. How much financing can you do for the show?"

"Can't say just yet," answered truthful Cuddy, fidgeting a bit.

"We got to get some jack some way," urged Calkins. "The show's thirty thousand dollars behind on



## *THE CIRCUS CLEM*

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the season. You know that bill of sale in your pocket gives me an annual salary as manager of twenty-five thousand dollars. That isn't much for a showman of my size. Your father and I agreed on that. But if the show don't make it, I don't get it. The show'd get more jack if I could make the grift stronger." Calkins decided upon a change of subject. "I'll talk to you about that later. Want to see the circus performance?"

Cuddy quickly assented, and they hastened into the circus tents.

Then came the fanfare of trumpets, the opening pageant, the whirl and maze and miracle of the first circus performance Cuddy had seen with the eyes of a circus owner.

There was Marion Fortescue on the milk-white tandem team, as a butterfly near the top of the tent, as a ballet dancer upon the tight wire, or whipping huge elephants into humble submission, and Marion Fortescue somersaulting through the air from trapeze to trapeze. Of course, Cuddy knew there were other performers present, but he failed to center his attention upon them. A boy of twenty-one suddenly come into a kingdom called the circus may be forgiven for being dazed by accession to such a throne, especially when the Queen of the Arena salutes him.

Cuddy would have remained in his happy state had he refrained from wandering into the side show after the main performance was concluded. He recalled afterward that Bings Balter, circus press agent, tried

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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to keep him out of there, but Cuddy was intent upon seeing all of his show. So, with Bings in charge, he walked into the Museum of Monstrosities. He was just in time to see a local farmer wager ten dollars on the turn of a wheel of fortune and to see the operator rob the farmer by stopping the wheel at a losing number. The robbery was so raw that even Cuddy detected the fraud. In a moment the interior of the tent was in turmoil. The farmer and his friends promptly engaged the grifter and his gang in bloody battle. Cuddy dived into the mêlée shouting: "I won't have this in my show." He had a fleeting glimpse of Goldman's dark and evil face. Then what felt like a ten-ton trip-hammer descended upon Cuddy's head and he passed out.

When Cuddy slowly opened his eyes, they met the eyes of Miss Marion Fortescue. His first sensations were of pain and peace. With pliant hands she bathed his battered head. Her cool fingers caressed his twitching eyes.

"W-w-w-h-h-ere a-am I?" he faltered.

"You're back of the dressing room and safe for a while," replied the Queen of the Arena.

"W-w-hat h-h-happened?"

"You were hurt in a clem," explained Miss Fortescue. "I told you to stay away from the clems."

"Do all shows have clems?" he groaned.

"Not the clean shows, just the grifting ones."

"Can this be made a clean show?"

"With the right man at the head of it."

## *THE CIRCUS CLEM*

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"Can I clean this show up?"

"If you have stuff in you."

"I'm the owner of this show, you know," suggested Cuddy.

"Sure of that?"

"Look in my inside coat pocket," Cuddy tried vainly to raise his hands.

Miss Marion Fortescue's fingers searched the corners of the pocket. The pocket lay just over Cuddy's heart.

"There's nothing there," she announced.

"Then my bill of sale is gone!" groaned Cuddy, trying to rise.

Miss Fortescue did not answer his question. What she said was:

"A nice boy like you has no business traveling with a circus. If you'll take my advice you'll hurry off this lot as soon as you can walk and go right back home where you belong."

Cuddy gazed at her steadily for a long time. She gazed just as steadily at him.

"I'll stick by this show if it kills me," he muttered as he slipped off into a troubled sleep.

Montrose Manson found her still soothing Cuddy's battered head with her capable hands.

"Put this kid on the cars, will you, Manson?" she asked.

"Like blazes I will," he snarled at her. "What's the big idea, Marion? Why nurse the simp? Haven't I told you, time and again, to leave all simps alone. I

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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might stand for your honeyin' up with some of these troupers on the show—but a simp! I should say not. Ain't he the same kid the grifters sapped in that clem just now?"

She nodded.

"I thought so. Say, what the devil you doing, nursing him for?"

"I've got good reasons—business reasons—honest I have, Manson. Won't you help me out and put the kid on the train?"

"That's about enough of that. You know I know what's good for you, and you know I told you long ago to have no truck with towners. Now that goes, right now and for all time. You leave that simp on the lot," Manson warned her as he stamped off toward the stables.

Marion searched for and found Jules Turner, the veteran clown. Jules was rehearsing his new trained pig act. She led him to the unconscious Cuddy.

"Please, Jules, put this kid on the train and say nothing. Just put him in Calkins' stateroom and say nothing. It'll be all right. I've never lied to you yet. I tell you it'll be all right, with Guv'ner Calkins and everybody. I'll fix it with the Guv'ner. Will you, Jules?" she pleaded.

Jules, old as he was, swung Cuddy's limp body over his Harlequin shoulder and staggered to the circus train.



## IV

### MARION GIVES ADVICE

**F**ATTY FRAZIER, official fixer for Calkins' Circus, awakened Cuddy in the morning. Cuddy resented this. He was sick, and tired in body and soul. Less than twenty-four hours before, he had been a respectable young man fresh from college. Now he felt smeared all over with the slime of a tough circus crew. His body ached from the beating given it the previous day at Roanoke.

"I'm supposed to take charge of you to-day, Mr. Cotter." This was Frazier's morning message. Cuddy received it without acclaim. He knew that Frazier, as the circus fixer, made the grifting games possible. Cuddy was fed up on the show business already. He had no chance with the pirates who surrounded him. Better kiss good-by to the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars his late father had sunk in this circus enterprise. Somewhere in the world there was a better job in life than fighting for possession of a circus he didn't want—a dirty, thieving circus. He wasn't a quitter but—

"Good morning, Mr. Cotter." Miss Marion Fortescue had descended the steps of the women's Pullman

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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as Cuddy and Frazier came out of the adjoining privilege car.

"Is it? I can't see it." Cuddy was still sore in soul and body.

"I think it's a glorious morning," she answered. "Every time I wake up in a new town on a spring day like this, with fresh green smells in the air and the birds hitting it up better than Ganwell's band—well, I bless God that He made me a circus trouper."

Cuddy turned to the fixer.

"Excuse me, Frazier. Miss Fortescue and I will walk to the lot together. I'll meet you there, in the cookhouse, at breakfast."

"Guv'ner Calkins' orders are to take charge of you to-day," said Frazier.

"I'm the Governor on this show now," Cuddy answered stiffly.

Frazier, being a professional fixer, was a diplomat.

"All right, Guv'ner. The lot's one block down the tracks, then six blocks to the right, and three blocks to the left. The last wagons off the train are just going over. Follow them." He dropped behind. Marion and Cuddy started for the lot. Her eyes were heavenly blue, her hair a Tuscan gold. She was as fresh as a peony. They trod a flowery path through the sleeping village of Dawsville. Cuddy was feeling better. What was it about her that reminded him of Marjorie, his college sweetheart? Perhaps her poise, her naturalness.



## MARION GIVES ADVICE

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"You have a dandy habit of turning up when I most need you," he said.

"You mean yesterday afternoon, after the clem?"

"I mean yesterday afternoon and I mean to-day. I was just about ready to quit when I came out of the car a minute ago."

"And now?" she plucked a four-petaled flower from a dogwood which drooped to greet her.

"I'm repeating what I told you when you nursed my bruised head yesterday. I'll stick to this show if it kills me," he said.

"I hate a quitter."

"So do I. That's why I sha'n't be one. Although I don't know how I'm going to stick. Tell me, who put me on the show train last night? Why didn't they leave me on the lot?"

"I guess Guv'ner Calkins and Goldman," said Miss Fortescue, "decided they better keep you on the show until you could run away on your own legs, peaceably, or until you produced some money. Calkins and Goldman and his outfit have enough against them now without a possible case of murder."

"You think they deliberately tried to kill me?"

"No. The rough-neck who hit you with the tent stake overdid it. They just wanted to hurt you bad enough so you would like college better than the circus. Unless you have some money, they don't see how they can use you."

Cuddy stopped at a flowering honeysuckle bush.

"I wonder if these things do have honey in them,"

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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he said. "Won't you join me in a bit of ambrosia?" He plucked two blossoms and gave her one.

Laughingly the circus girl held to her lips the tiny flower and sipped its drop of honey. Cuddy, draining his fragrant chalice, silently toasted Marjorie Trent. Sweet-smelling white locusts arched above them.

"Who stole my bill of sale for this show? It was in my pocket before I was stunned yesterday," he resumed.

"I can't say," she answered.

Cuddy looked at her sharply, at her clear, pink complexion, exquisite profile, full red lips. She was not at all like Marjorie Dawson Trent. She was light, Marjorie dark. She was small, Marjorie tall. Marjorie was—

Miss Fortescue indicated by a slight motion of her hand that she chose to have him raise and carry her blue parasol. Cuddy hastened to render this trifling service.

"You said something yesterday about cleaning up this show, Miss Fortescue. How shall I begin?"

"By getting rid of Frazier. The grifters can't grift unless he fixes the town. That's what caused some of the trouble yesterday."

"But I have nothing to prove that I own this show, unless I produce my missing bill of sale."

"Have you any lawyer friends?"

"My Uncle Ned in New York."

"What's the full name and address?"

Cuddy recited it to her.

## MARION GIVES ADVICE

---

"Does Guv'ner Calkins know that?"

"Yes. He and Uncle Ned know each other."

They had reached the lot.

"Then don't let Calkins bluff you. Here comes Frazier to take you in charge. Good-by. The cook-house steward has sent me to another table."

Cuddy surrendered Marion's parasol with reluctance. It was, indeed, a glorious spring morning. The kind of a morning to make a fight worth while.

Although Cuddy breakfasted between Calkins and Frazier with Goldman on the other side of the oilcloth-covered table, his appetite staged a surprising comeback. His headache was gone. The orderly haste with which the show was setting up appealed to him. He hated the grifters around him, but he felt a first young love for—he guessed some of his early ancestors must have been showmen. Probably that was it.

"Let's go, Mr. Cotter." It was Fatty Frazier. Always the diplomat, he addressed Cuddy as "Mr." and not as "Guv'ner," in Guv'ner Calkins' presence. One never could tell who might be boss of the show on the morrow, but Frazier was still taking orders from Calkins. "Let's go," he repeated. "I have business downtown." Cuddy followed Frazier from the cookhouse.

"You'll have a different idea about grift with a circus after you've been around with me," Frazier assured him as they reached the village square. "We'll see the chief of police first."

They found and entered the city hall.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Good morning, Chief," said the circus fixer as they were ushered into the presence of the head of the municipal police force. "I'm Frazier, officer with Calkins' Circus. Just dropped in to pay my respects to a brother officer. This is Mr. Cotter, also with the circus. How's everything?"

The chief and Frazier grasped hands as brother officers should. The chief bowed with dignity to Cuddy who replied in kind. Then Frazier got down to business.

"Chief," he said, "you've had a lot of experience in police work. I've heard about you for months. Been looking forward to meeting you ever since we came into this territory. Got a letter of introduction to you from the chief of Keensville." He submitted it to their host who read it perfunctorily.

"Chief," Frazier went on, "you know how this circus business is. We've got a Sunday school show, if you want it. Or we can put on a few little games of chance, if you want them. In other words, we carry a Jack-in-the-Box. We can keep him in, or we can let him out, just as you say."

The chief of police lighted the generous cigar which Frazier gave him. "What kind of games?" he asked.

"Well, Chief, just about the kind the young fellows around here like to play, I guess. A little wheel of fortune, some roll-downs, pick-outs and all that. All perfectly legitimate. Made for sporting gentlemen. All on the square, you know."

"We had a lot of trouble with the last circus that



## *MARION GIVES ADVICE*

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was here," the chief objected. "Lot of our people lost money to the circus gamblers. Kicked up a muss with my department."

"Nothing like that on our show, Chief," Frazier assured him. "I'll guarantee you don't hear any squawk from our lot. We just have some nice clean games."

"Well, I like a little poker, et cetera, myself," the chief of police was mellowing. "If there won't be any trouble—"

"Positively not, Chief," the fixer hastened to say. "Unless some of our workmen might quit without giving us the proper two weeks' notice. If they do, or any one else comes to you about the show, just you send them to me. I'll take care of them. And for your trouble, Chief, if there is any, just a little present from me."

Frazier laid upon the chief's desk a crisp, yellow-backed twenty-dollar bill, and twenty tickets to the show. The chief absent-mindedly slipped them into his pocket.

"All right," he said.

"Come out and see us, Chief," urged the fixer, as he and Cuddy withdrew from the official presence.

"Did you see him take it?" Frazier chuckled, as they reached the street.

Cuddy nodded gloomily. "Rotten crook, Frazier," he thought.

"They all will," Frazier asserted. "Now for the sheriff's office."



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Frazier was even more cordial with the sheriff, to whom he called "Glad to meet you." He had a grapevine report on the sheriff. One line of the report said: "Give this bird the quick glad-hand. He's all right."

"I'm Frazier. Officer with Calkins' Circus. Just dropped in to pay my respects." Cuddy noted that Frazier's formula remained unchanged. "How they treating you, Sheriff?"

"Oh, so so," replied the sheriff.

"Want you to come out and see us, Sheriff. Got a nice, clean little show, no grift."

The sheriff yawned and stretched his arms.

"Of course, we can put on a few little games of chance, Sheriff."

The sheriff abruptly terminated his yawn. "What's that?" he snapped.

"Well, I mean that some of the boys with the show got a little red blood in them, and don't mind taking a chance with some of your sporting men if it's all right and regular, you know." Thus spoke Frazier.

"Gambling's illegal in this county," said the sheriff shortly.

"Oh, of course," Frazier assented. "I don't mean regular gambling. That wouldn't do for either of us. Just some little wheels, you know, and things like that." Frazier reclined casually upon the sheriff's desk. "We have," he said, "about the same philosophy of life, Sheriff, you and I. If you go out of this office at the end of your term well heeled your people will say you're a smart man. If you go out broke, you'd have a hard

## MARION GIVES ADVICE

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time borrowing a ten-dollar bill from any of the reformers. Nothing succeeds like success. Now you'll have no trouble on account of us. But there's one thing I'd like to get your office to do for me. I'd like to have you send four of your men out to our show, just to watch the autos. Our people don't steal lap-robbers, but your own people do. One farmer steals from the other. There were nine million dollars' worth of automobile robes stolen in this country last year. Of course, the minute a farmer misses his robe he blames it on the show people. We're always blamed for everything. So if you'll have two men watch those autos around the circus lot in the afternoon, while your other two men see the show, then let them change places at night—well, I'll be very glad to pay them for their trouble. And if you should want me at any time, just ask for Frazier. I'll be on the lot."

Frazier and Cuddy moved toward the door. On the sheriff's desk reposed a nice, crisp, yellow-backed twenty-dollar bill and a dozen circus tickets. As Frazier and Cuddy backed through the door, bill and tickets mysteriously disappeared. The sheriff smiled blandly. So did Frazier.

"Never taught you that in college," remarked Frazier triumphantly to Cuddy.

"Think I shall suggest it for our extension course in sociology," said Cuddy glumly.

"Now we'll see the district attorney and then all'll be set," chuckled the legal adjuster of Calkins' Circus.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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That was the title Frazier gave himself when he greeted the district attorney.

"But of course I can't practice law in this county, even if I wanted to," Frazier explained to the district attorney. "We're not carrying any surety bond, and sometimes, just as our train is ready to pull out for the next town, some disgruntled employee, through some crooked lawyer, gets out an attachment against us. Then if there isn't some one to act for us quick we may get stalled. So we retain a lawyer to represent us in each town. Now you, Mr. District Attorney, are one of the big legal lights of this country or you wouldn't hold your high office. I don't believe we shall have any need for an attorney to-day, but so long as my instructions as legal adjuster are to retain some local attorney for the circus, I don't see why you might not have the money as well as any one else. And so, if you don't object—"

Frazier completed a maneuver now familiar to Cuddy. He moved away from the district attorney's desk. There remained on the desk in plain sight a crisp, yellow-backed, twenty-dollar bill and twenty circus tickets.

"You don't have any gambling games with your circus, Mr. Frazier?"

"Not one," replied Mr. Frazier in perfect truth. He knew that the games with Calkins' Circus were of the sure-fire variety. "But," he added, "should any one come to you about the show just send them to me.

## MARION GIVES ADVICE

---

I'll take care of them. We probably shan't call upon you at all."

Frazier meant every word he said in his last sentence.

As Frazier and Cuddy stepped out of the district attorney's office into the courthouse square, Cuddy chameleoned from dismal drab to shining silver. His budding heart burst into springtime bloom. For the first time he beheld his own circus parade and there, close to the head of the procession, her team of tandem whites stepping briskly to the music of the band, rode Miss Marion Fortescue! For the first time he beheld the circus girl in parade costume. She was all in white, from high-plumed hat to riding skirt. If youth must be served, let it be served in a Virginia town on a soft spring morning by the vision of a white-clad circus girl on milk-white steed! Cuddy struggled against leaving the sidewalk and soaring into the cerulean sky.

"I told you how easy it was to fix a town. They all want the grift." Frazier was trying to talk.

"Cut it," demanded Cuddy. "My father spent one hundred and fifty thousand dollars just so I could see this."

Cuddy thought he was referring to the parade. He was, in fact, referring to Miss Marion Fortescue, of the clear, pink complexion, the daintily gloved hands, the exquisite profile, the equestrienne grace, and hair of Tuscan gold. She smiled cheerfully as she passed him. He raised his hat. "You gave me good advice," he thought.

The rest of the parade followed. There were knights



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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and ladies in courtly costumes, open dens of dubiously wild animals, plodding pachyderms, supercilious camels, the clown band, the vociferous calliope. These passed him, but he saw them not. They were all his, or would be, when he had won his fight. But the thing that mattered was the young girl on the milk-white steed, the girl in white, with hair of Tuscan gold!

Then from ecstasy Cuddy turned to querulousness.

"Who's that fellow who leads the parade?" He turned to Frazier. "I mean the big one all dressed up like a cavalier who rode just ahead of Miss Fortescue. The one with the hard-looking face."

"Oh, him," Frazier answered. "That's Montrose Manson, the equestrian director. He's a pretty important fellow around this show. He always leads the parade. Marion sort of belongs to Manson. He broke her into the business."

Frazier resumed his dissertation upon the frailty of official mankind, and of towners in general.

"These towners are always looking for their bit," he said. "They come and ask you for it if you don't run around and hand it to 'em. Some folks think the grift's all wrong, but it's been part of the show business since the Civil War, when the southern states put their licenses so high the circuses had to grift to cover expenses. Now the local officials think they must have it. And as for the village simps and the country yaps, they're just itching for a chance to show how smart they are with the show folks."

Cuddy tried to ignore Frazier. His soul centered



## MARION GIVES ADVICE

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upon a beautiful young girl with pink complexion, daintily gloved hands, exquisite profile, matchless grace, and hair of gold, the girl on the milk-white steed. Hang Frazier! Why couldn't he keep quiet! And hang Manson, too! He was too much in evidence.

They reached the circus lot as the parade returned. Marion's horse nearly stepped on Cuddy. She leaned down to him.

"Get rid of Frazier," she said in a low voice.

Frazier was surveying the crowd for possible suckers.

Cuddy replied with quiet assurance: "I surely will."

When Frazier turned to him, Cuddy was humming a tune.

"What tune is that?" asked Frazier.

"Oh, something from a musical comedy," Cuddy answered carelessly. He lied. He had been singing softly to himself:

"In days of old when knights were bold  
And barons held their sway,  
A warrior bold, with spurs of gold,  
Sang merrily his lay."

Frazier, whose job was to sell Cuddy on the circus grift idea, was a business man and not a romanticist. "Come into the kid show, Mr. Cotter, and I'll show you how hungry these boobs are for the grift," he said. "I'll see you don't get hurt like you did yesterday," he added. "That was a most regrettable accident."

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Before I go in there, Frazier, tell me why Montrose Manson is confabbing with Guv'ner Calkins all the time. There they are now, powwowing over by the ticket wagon."

"Oh, Manson has to talk to Guv'ner Calkins a lot, seein' as how Manson's equestrian director. He's pretty strong with Goldman, too."

"Is that why I just heard Manson say to Goldman, 'The next time you sap that simp, sap him good and hard'? And whom do you suppose Manson was referring to as the 'simp'?"

"Oh, no one in particular, I guess," the fixer answered. "Let's go into the kid show, Mr. Cotter, so I can show you just how easy the towners fall for the circus grift."

## V

### AMONG THE GRIFTERS

**I**N obedience to Fatty Frazier's suggestion Cuddy followed the fixer into the side show to receive his first instructions in grift as an applied science.

Allured by the eloquence of old Doc Inman's ballyhoo, the blatant banners, and the blaring band, a number of town and country folk were gazing upon the Museum of Monstrosities with that vacuity peculiar to side show patrons. The deeply indented sword swallower, the highly muraled tattooed gentleman, the Circassian lady with the sleepy snakes held attention for a moment. Then other attractions caught the public's eye.

Near the side of the tent, in a conspicuous position, hung a huge banner bearing the letters of the alphabet, with legends of great import. If the lucky holder of a twenty-five-cent ticket drew the letter "E" from one of many envelopes in a box beneath the banner he would win a bottle of cologne worth one dollar, if a "G," his prize would be a two-dollar bottle, an "R," he might carry away a three-dollar bottle of cologne.

"That's a cologne joint, one of the oldest and easiest of the cinches," Frazier whispered in Cuddy's ear.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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The suave grifter in charge had many twenty-five-cent customers. Each in turn picked an envelope from a paper box and handed it to the grifter, who opened it, exhibited the letter it contained—and passed on to the next victim.

“No one seems to draw the lucky numbers,” remarked Cuddy.

“It works this way,” volunteered Frazier. “If a boob happens to draw a winning letter, such as ‘E,’ the grifter draws it out until it looks like an ‘F,’ which doesn’t win anything. Or if the simp lights on a winning ‘G,’ the grifter pulls it out just far enough to show that it’s a ‘C,’ which is also a blank. If a lucky ‘R’ happens to be drawn, the grifter pulls it out of the envelope until it look like a ‘P,’ say ‘a blank’ or something like that—and the boob doesn’t win.

“Now this swinging ball is a little more scientific.” Frazier moved to another grifter’s field of operations. A wooden cone rested base down upon a small platform. From a little frame above the cone hung a small rubber ball. The operator of this device was harvesting quarters as fast as he could take them in at “two bits a try.”

Frazier explained. “The game is to knock the cone over with the swinging ball. The joke is, that if the point of the cone is directly beneath the point from which the ball hangs, any boob can knock the cone over. See the village smarty try it? He missed. That’s because the ‘joint man’—the operator—moved

the cone just a little from the center. And no one can hit it now, until he moves it back. Very simple."

"Why," exclaimed Cuddy, "that's a problem in physics! They teach that in physics lab, at college!"

"They may teach it, but no one learns it, until he studies it under a circus tent," remarked the circus fixer.

Goldman, chief of the grifters, passed upon his slinking way.

"Everything all right?" he shot at Frazier through the corner of his mouth. He glowered at Cuddy, who glowered in turn.

"Sure. Not a wrong one in town," Frazier shot back from the corner of his mouth.

"I don't understand that mouth-corner conversation," suggested Cuddy.

"That means that none of the local officials here are wrong. They are wrong when they can't be fixed. They're all right here. You saw me fix 'em."

"Will they stay fixed?"

"If there's not too many 'squawks.' "

"What's a 'squawk'?"

"A holler from a bird that's had some of his feathers plucked."

While Cuddy digested this picturesque language, he was conducted to a roll-down. Each patron of the roll-down invested twenty-five cents in three marbles. These rolled from top to bottom of an inclined board set with many pins. If the marbles fell into certain slots the investor won cash or merchandise. If not—



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"See that joint man's hand resting on the edge of the roll-down board," said Frazier to Cuddy. "Looks as if he was just resting it there, eh? But if he presses a little, the marbles fall into winning slots—for the 'shillabers' or 'cappers.' No one else wins."

A horizontal fortune wheel was doing business near the Punch and Judy stand. A farmer lad shouted "Wait a minute" to the operator, reached over from the outside of the group of townsfolk, placed a dollar on a certain number and won forty. Business boomed there for a few minutes, but the wheel won all the money wagered.

"He's what we call a 'reach-over,'" explained the fixer. "He's with the show. One of Goldman's men. The other fellows who were winning just before him are 'shills' or 'shillabers' or 'boosters' or 'cappers.' They're local talent. We hire them for five dollars apiece."

"To help rob their friends!" said Cuddy.

"They think it's smart," said Frazier.

An adventurous countryman wagered fifteen dollars on a turn of the wheel and lost. He made violent protest. Cuddy recalled yesterday's riot.

"The game is crooked," the loser yelled. Cuddy prepared for another clem.

Another farmer took the sucker by the arm.

"Come on. Let's go from here. We can't win at this game. I just lost some money, too."

The twain wandered away, earnestly discussing their losses.

"That last farmer is one of Goldman's men," explained Frazier. "We call him a 'steerer' or 'outside man.' You understand about the wheel. The operator or 'spieler' stops it where he wants to, by his foot underneath the table, or by leaning against the wheel with his stomach. But this is all small stuff. Come behind the curtain here and I'll show you a strong joint."

One of Goldman's expert craftsmen was presiding at a three-shell game. "Goes better than ever," whispered Frazier to Cuddy. "There's a three-card monte game next to that. The fellow just getting up sold a horse to Calkins this morning for three hundred dollars. Then Calkins introduced him to this game. Calkins lost a little jack, which he'll get back from the grifters, on the quiet."

The horse dealer rose.

"I'm clean, but you wait until I get down to the bank and back. I can beat this game," he declared.

"All right, Colonel. Always glad to give a gentleman a chance to get even," the card shark replied.

"Doesn't cost Guv'ner Calkins much for his horses," remarked Frazier. "Hello! It's dinner time. This afternoon I'll put you next to the 'walk-a-way' on the ticket wagon to see how the 'lucky boys' 'take the cake' on the outside, and how the 'connection men' work on the inside."

Cuddy sought Marion Fortescue after dinner. The girl was sitting in the shade of the dressing room mending a flimsy blue ballet skirt. "For my wire act," she

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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explained. "How are you getting on with Frazier?"

Cuddy related the day's revelations. "And I suppose the end is not yet," he concluded sadly. He was crouched at her feet now, smoking a cigarette and watching her fingers at their expert work.

"I hinted to Guv'ner Calkins that you had rich relatives who might let you put some more money in this show," she told him. "That's one reason you're still here."

"There's no chance of my putting any more money into this show or into anything else." This from Cuddy.

"I know that." She looked squarely at him.

"Then why did you invent that yarn for Calkins?"

"I wanted you to have your chance as a showman."

"Oh, I'm not licked yet," said Cuddy.

"No good trouper ever is," she replied.

"Do you know, Miss Fortescue," said Cuddy, "you certainly did look stunning on parade this morning."

Miss Marion Fortescue turned a deeper pink. Her needle pricked her finger.

"It's very nice of you to say that."

"I mean it. I mean what I say now, and I meant what I said last night, that I'll stick to this show if it kills me."

"I wouldn't like to have you do that. Be killed, you know."

"I'm not very tough, yet," he answered, "but I can hang on. And I made up my mind this morning that I am head over heels in love"—she looked up quickly—

## AMONG THE GRIFTERS

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"with the show business." Her eyes returned to her sewing.

"You're an awfully nice boy," she said. "Much too nice to be in the show business. You'll go back to your home and your college some day."

"College is a million miles from me now," he declared. And he leaned against a tent stake and with great comfort finished his cigarette. He was on his great adventure.

"Letter for you, Mr. Cotter." It was the circus mail agent. "It's a special delivery, but I signed for it," he added.

Cuddy took the legal-sized envelope with surprise. Then he saw that it was from Uncle Ned's office. Cuddy opened it casually. Then he turned as red as his band wagon. On Uncle Ned's letter sheet were the typed lines: "I haven't told Marjorie what you are doing—but I think you are treating her shabbily." There was a smaller envelope addressed to him in care of Uncle Ned in Marjorie Trent's handwriting.

"Will you excuse me, Miss Fortescue?" said Cuddy.

"Certainly," she replied, and went on with her mending. Leaning against a wardrobe trunk Cuddy read:

"DEAREST CUDDY:

"I've tried in vain to understand your strange letter from New York and your stranger disappearance. I fail to visualize any situation which might provoke either. So far as I can learn, only your Uncle Ned knows where you are and what you are doing. He will tell me nothing over the long distance. He hints that you are doing something



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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that you want to hide from me. You must let me know where you are and what you are doing. Every one in college misses you. Slat's Murphy was, apparently, the last of the crowd to see you. Many foolish stories float around the campus. Do you think you are quite fair to me? I have not told father and mother of your disappearance, but I shall have to soon. Cuddy, you know what you mean to me.

“MARJORIE.”

Cuddy read the letter three times. Each time it became less and less distinct. There were certain traditions in Marjorie's family that were never broken. They would not forgive him for becoming a circus man. They were particularly fussy about social class. And she thought him a coward and a sneak!

Cuddy put the letter in his pocket. He looked up at Marion Fortescue. “Remarkable,” he thought, “that such a girl could have grown up in a circus ring.” He wondered who her people were. Perhaps not anybody in particular. He hadn't found time to learn much about that. Perhaps she did not have social distinctions to worry about.

Slowly, very slowly, Cuddy drew Marjorie's letter from his pocket, and slowly, very slowly, he struck a match and held the burning letter until only a black ash clung to his fingers. Finally the wind blew that bit of black ash after its fellows.

“Thank you for giving me so much help, Miss Fortescue,” he said. “I have to go on the front door now to see how they open the big show.”



## *AMONG THE GRIFTERS*

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Miss Fortescue, looking up from the mended circus costume, watched the black ashes dance across the sodded lot into a neighboring field. Then she joined Montrose Manson in the pad room.

"Manson," she said, "you and I have had a sort of understanding about each other for the past three years. I know you feel that I owe my professional success to you and I don't doubt that I do. But I want to be square with you and tell you that—unless—something—very—unexpected—happens—I cannot—marry—you."

The equestrian director whirled on her, whip in hand.

"I know what's in your mind, Marion," he growled, his face thrust close to hers. "But when the time comes you'll make up your mind the way I want it—and—you'll go—with me."

"Don't be so sure, my long-time friend. You've blown your equestrian director's whistle and cracked your trainer's whip so long that you think every one must jump to your commands. For once you may be, and probably are, mistaken."

"As for that," he snapped at her, "the simp you've lost your head about will not be on the show next week. When he's been blowed you'll have some sense. Until then—I'll remember you're a female. I've trained all kinds. A mare is always flightier than a horse. But I can handle you."

## VI

### THE FIXING OF FRAZIER

“**B**EFORE I start to clean the house I must know where the dirt is,” reflected Cuddy, as he prepared to take his second lesson in practical circus grift. Having seen the grifters “working the towners” in the side show, he was preparing to witness similar operations in other circus departments. He decided to give the “front door” his next attention.

“This pile of jack to my right,” Rony explained to Cuddy, as the latter stepped into the ticket wagon, “is show money. ‘Circus cash on hand’ you might call it. The smaller pile to my left is the walk-away. See this fellow sticking up a five-dollar bill for two tickets. I always ask each one how many he wants so there’s no dispute. This bird called for two. That’s twice seventy-five cents, which is one dollar and fifty cents, including war tax. I give him back two one-dollar bills and five quarters. By the time he gets out of that jam in front of the wagon and counts his money he may or may not find out he is a quarter shy. If he does find out he is shy and fights his way back through the crowd to the window, I may or may not give him the quarter holdout. Depends on how much he squawks.

## *THE FIXING OF FRAZIER*

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As a rule I give it back as soon as the simp squawks. Most of them never come back. Very few of them squawk. Lots of them never miss it."

Rony was working with machinelike speed while he talked. Two hundred natives or towners were trying to buy tickets at once. Rony's window ledge was above their heads. They had to reach up to get their tickets. Rony could see them, but they could not see him. He had the advantage of position and shadow. He worked automatically, throwing the walk-away money to his left as he worked. What Rony lacked in size he made up in speed, and "ginger."

"How much in the walk-away pile?" asked Cuddy.

Rony merely glanced at it. "About twenty dollars," he said.

"Mostly quarters?"

"Some halves. Are you coming back to count up after the big show starts?" He wiped his freckled brow with a veteran bandanna.

"Not to-day, Rony. Must watch the performance to-day. Have seen it only once since I came on the show." Cuddy was mastering some of the circus vernacular.

Fatty Frazier awaited him as Cuddy left the ticket wagon. "Want to show you how Jerry Miggins and Ed Bard, the 'lucky boys,' take the cake," he said.

Frazier led the way toward the marquee which marked the front entrance. Just where the in-going crowd was thickest stood short, fat, ruddy Jerry and long, thin, pale-faced Ed, each in his shirt sleeves, each

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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with a small black satchel slung by a narrow strap from his shoulders. Each satchel was open so that all the world might see the money contained therein. Beneath the visor of each "lucky boy's" cap shone a pair of shifty eyes.

Jerry's roving glance alighted upon a likely-looking prospect whom he addressed with:

"Excuse me, friend. But I'm manager of this show and we're terribly long on change. Could you let me have a ten-dollar bill for silver?"

The obliging native produced the bill; jovial Jerry thanked him, carefully counted the silver dollars into the hand of the native, put the ten-dollar bill in his satchel, then moved discreetly to a new position. An "outside man" gently pushed the victim through the main entrance. In five minutes the victim, having discovered that he had been counted out of a dollar, breasted the incoming stream of circus patrons and sought Jerry, who could not be found.

Ed Bard solemnly intervened. "Looking for that feller that gave you change?" he asked. "He's a crook. He don't belong with the show. We had him arrested," the long thin Bard asserted as he ushered the victim back into the circus tent.

Frazier called Cuddy's attention to the finesse of these "lucky boys." "They keep this up all day—but they just miss being artists," Frazier complained. "They each take about eighty dollars' worth of cake a day. Their bit is only fifteen per cent. But if they improve and don't have many squawks and don't have



## *THE FIXING OF FRAZIER*

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to throw much money back, Goldman promotes them to the strong joints in the kid show. That's where the big grift money is."

Cuddy began to feel ill again. Giddily he followed Fatty Frazier into the menagerie and was presented to Butch Batchellor, an engaging individual with two hamlike fists.

"Butch has the candy stand, red hot and balloon privileges with the show," Frazier explained. "His boys work from the candy stands and on the seats, on salary and commission, but the show is supposed to get all the short change these silver men cop."

"How much do they—cop?" queried Cuddy, becoming more and more disgusted. He longed to meet some one without a shifty eye.

"More than they turn into Calkins and Goldman," admitted Frazier in a burst of confidence. "They get two dollars a week, ten per cent commission, transportation, board and berth. But they get away with a lot of the short-change silver, too. All Calkins and Goldman can do is to keep down the average of the butcher boys' private holdout. Each boy usually turns in four or five dollars a day to Calkins, who divides it with Goldman."

Frazier led Cuddy to the canvas alley or "connection" between the menagerie tent and the main tent or big top where Frazier presented Frisco Red and Oshkosh Phil, as "pretty good connection men." "Reserved seats are only a quarter in this town so our grift isn't so good," explained Oshkosh Phil—"but



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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just watch Red work." A poorly dressed woman leading a little boy paused to purchase a reserved seat. She gave Red a two-dollar bill. Red remarked politely: "Madam, you will not need any reserved seat for the little boy, not on this show. You can hold him on your lap." "Thank you, sir," she said, as he handed her a dollar bill, a quarter, a dime and three nickels. "That leaves Red a quarter to the good," Phil grinned. "Not one in a hundred ever catches him at it."

Cuddy nodded, in understanding. "That's dirty, sneaking thievery," he muttered.

"Of course this all looks like small business to you," Frazier said apologetically. He saw a look of disappointment on Cuddy's face. Cuddy couldn't help showing some of his feelings. So Frazier tried to comfort him with, "It's the small money that counts up."

"A show couldn't live on what it takes in on the front door. The profits come from the side show, the pit show, the girl show, the kid show, the concert, the candy stands, red hot stands—and the gift. Then, of course, the show runs a crap game in the side show or kid show for the workingmen. That crap game is all on the square, you know, but Guv'ner Calkins and Sol Goldman get a good stiff rake-off from it. That's the same with the stud poker and the roulette wheel in the privilege car. Then, of course, the kinkers in the dressing room, the windjammers in the band, the rough-necks on canvas, stable men on horses, animal

## *THE FIXING OF FRAZIER*

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men, and the razorbacks on the train crew, everybody on the show has to eat after the night performance, so they buy privilege car pie books from the show and the books are charged against their pay, and they eat or drink or gamble most of their money back to the show."

"Do you think that's all right?" asked Cuddy.

"Sure," said Frazier. "If the pay roll people didn't spend it on the privilege car they'd spend it downtown nights and maybe miss the train in the bargain. And Calkins won't let any grifter work on the show unless that grifter will go against Calkins' own games on the privilege car. Guv'ner Calkins and Sol Goldman have an understanding about that. They mean to keep the grifters broke. Grifters work best that way."

"They're not very smart," said Cuddy.

"If they were smart they wouldn't be grifters."

"Supposing through some e—er—error in your work as legal adjuster, Mr. Frazier, some of these gentlemen of chance should happen to be arrested?"

"The grifters know that we'll always spring them out. That's one rule that's never broken on this show. We never leave a man in jail. He's sprung by the time the train pulls out for the next town."

"Always?"

"Always," said Frazier, his eye on the "connection" men.

And there Cuddy left him, to look for more advice.

"It's not going to be so easy to get rid of Fatty

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Frazier," Cuddy admitted to Marion Fortescue that afternoon.

"Try to get the district attorney to put Frazier away to-night," she suggested.

"That would be impossible; the district attorney's been fixed by Frazier," Cuddy replied.

"Won't you please put it up to the district attorney?" Marion pleaded. "I know much more about these things than you do."

Cuddy vanished from the circus lot and presently appeared before the district attorney. That gentleman was providentially in his office. He recognized Cuddy without difficulty. That was one of his best bets, his ability to recall a face once he had seen it and to name a name once he had heard it.

"Mr. District Attorney," said Cuddy, "I was present this morning when Fatty Frazier, fixer for Calkins' Circus, handed you a bribe. As I did not object I may be technically a party to the crime. But I don't think so, for I am going to bring charges against you unless you put Frazier in jail on a charge of attempted bribery and keep him there two weeks."

"That is preposterous, impossible!" The district attorney swelled with indignation. "Frazier merely retained me as attorney for Calkins' Circus. Leave my office instantly, young man!" He advanced threateningly.

Cuddy sadly picked up his hat. It had been a silly bluff. Of course it could not have worked. The tele-

## THE FIXING OF FRAZIER

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phone bell rang. The district attorney talked long and acidly with the party on the other end of the line.

"All right, Colonel. I must respect your wishes in the matter."

The district attorney hung up the receiver. He was unhappy.

"I don't know how you managed to bring Colonel Charles Farnwood, proprietor of the Dawsville *Herald* and of Dawsville politics, into this case, but I've just had my orders from him. Frazier will be put away at ten o'clock to-night." Cuddy dazedly withdrew.

At nine-thirty that night Jerry Miggins came in haste into the presence of Fatty Frazier, fixer for Calkins' Circus, on the circus lot.

"Better beat it to the district attorney's office," Jerry wheezed. "There's been an awful squawk down there account of some raw work by the strong joints."

Frazier did not hesitate. At ten o'clock he was in the district attorney's office. At twelve o'clock he was in the county jail. At twelve-thirty the special train bearing Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair pulled out of Dawsville without its official fixer.

Cuddy, curled up in his berth, covertly rejoiced while Guv'ner Calkins and Sol Goldman fretted at the loss of Fatty Frazier.

"Damned funny we couldn't spring our own fixer," said Calkins.

"Damned funny we couldn't give a bond in a case like that," said Goldman.

"How much did you get on the day, Goldman?"



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Calkins asked the important question of his chief grifter.

"Total of two thousand nine hundred and fifty dollars. Pretty good day for the gift."

"About as much jack as we got with the show. Let's see what it cost for fixing and squaring." He consulted Frazier's memorandum.

"Sheriff's office cost thirty-five dollars. District attorney's office, twenty-five dollars. Police, twenty dollars. Tickets, forty broads at seventy-five cents; thirty reserves at fifty cents. Total, one hundred and twenty-five dollars. No squawks and no throwbacks," he read.

Cuddy noted that Frazier's actual expenditures and his charges to his boss were not the same. They did not tally. Frazier had "held out" on his boss.

Goldman spread the gift money, in currency and coin, on Calkins' table. Calkins counted it, found the amount as given, deducted one hundred and twenty-five dollars from the total, divided the remainder into two piles of one thousand four hundred and twelve dollars and fifty cents each, pushed one pile across the table to Goldman, and stuffed the other pile into a rusty leather wallet which he then slipped into his inside vest pocket.

"About Frazier, now," Calkins resumed.

Inspired by the same idea they turned toward Cuddy. That youth breathed deeply, regularly, with eyes closed.

"That simp never could have framed it," they signaled to each other.

Cuddy was puzzled by his own sudden success, by



## *THE FIXING OF FRAZIER*

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the ease with which he had disposed of Frazier. He was also puzzled by two messages Rony Gavin slipped into his hand as Gavin passed through the privilege car just before the circus train left Dawsville.

One message was signed by Marion Fortescue and contained one word "Congratulations." The other was a telegram from Uncle Ned. It was a little longer and quite querulous. "Who in thunder is Marion Fortescue?" it demanded.

## VII

### A BLOW-OFF

C UDDY was seriously contemplating an answer to Uncle Ned's telegram: "Who in thunder is Marion Fortescue?"

Three days had passed since that message reached college-bred Cuddy, theoretical owner of Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair, at Dawsville, Virginia. Cuddy—three days and three hundred miles from Dawsville—was still contemplating an answer. He was also contemplating Marion Fortescue, about to parade through Dundonald's streets.

Cuddy's survey of Marion Fortescue was, for the moment, distant. She was chatting with Montrose Manson, equestrian director and master horse-trainer of the show. She wore the white-plumed hat and the white riding costume which had so intrigued Cuddy at Dawsville. Her slender figure was clearly outlined against the red and gold of the first band wagon. Back of that were the white tents of the circus. Back of the tents were the red clay hills, the dark green pines and the clear blue sky of a Virginia spring morning. It was a morning to set one's soul at peace, or to make

it sing to the symphony of tramping horses, clinking harness, roaring lions, trumpeting elephants, tentative notes from the circus bands and a clarion bugle call announcing that the parade was ready to leave the lot. It was a symphony that called to youth but found no response in Cuddy's soul.

Cuddy was only twenty-one, and as he continued to regard Marion Fortescue that capable young lady took the reins of her white tandem team from the hands of Montrose Manson, put one hand on Manson's shoulder and swung onto her saddle horse. Cuddy regarded Manson's assistance as offensively superfluous. And he didn't know how to answer Uncle Ned's telegram.

Who in thunder was Marion Fortesque? Cuddy had been trying to solve that riddle for three days. He could spend hours describing her if he were talking across the table in Uncle Ned's New York office and that testy relative would spare the hours from his legal practice. Or he could sit down and write reams about her to Uncle Ned, if he had the time to write or Uncle Ned had the patience to read. But as for salient facts, the few he could relate were bald enough—to the unsympathetic outsider. He could recite them in a moment, like quotations from a catalogue.

Marion Fortescue was a circus performer, twenty years old, muscular, slender, very pretty, with hair of Tuscan gold. That sounded trite enough. Marion Fortescue had a strange power that kept him on the circus against his will and the will of Calkins and his grifting crew. That sounded like nonsense, but he

knew it to be true. Marion Fortescue was Cuddy's only hope of getting possession of the circus and winning back the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars his late father had sunk in the circus venture. That sounded like a business proposition. Uncle Ned knew that if Cuddy didn't put over that business proposition Cuddy would start his post-college career without a penny. The whole thing was bizarre enough. But that was the situation Cuddy faced.

Cuddy's conscience smote him for burning Marjorie Dawson Trent's letter at Dawsville. That was no way to treat his college sweetheart. But what else could he do as long as he must keep under cover and hide his whereabouts and his daily deeds from all the old college crowd? Cuddy was wrestling with a problem he had not found in Euclid.

Calkins brought him out of his blue funk by making him see red. The transformation was effected by a simple question.

"When you going to put some money into this show, Mr. Cotter?"

"I've put all the money into this show I'm going to put," Cuddy snapped this at the rubicund, grifting showman, as the latter disturbed Cuddy's contemplation of his life's problem, and of Miss Marion Fortescue riding away near the head of the parade, just behind Montrose Manson, whom Cuddy somehow regarded as his evil genius.

"But you haven't put any money into the show yet," remonstrated the circus impresario.

"My father did. A clear one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Yes. But that's all gone into the show."

"And the show's mine. I have a bill of sale for it."

"So you told me at Roanoke when you first came. But you didn't show me the bill and I never had no notice of its being recorded anywhere."

"I had it all right, when I came on the show."

"Ain't you got it now?"

Cuddy lighted a fresh cigarette.

"You and your gang frisked me for it after you knocked me cold in that clem at Roanoke," he answered, in Calkins' vernacular.

"Now, Mr. Cotter, you and I had that out days ago." The showman spoke in accents mild. "I admit that I did give your father a bill of sale for the show and that you told me you had inherited it. I also admit that your uncle, Nathaniel Cotter, advised me that you had such a bill of sale and was the legal owner of the show. But I don't see no evidence. And I haven't never seen no evidence. I asked you for it the day you came on and you stalled. Then you mixed up in a clem and got knocked cold. When you came out of that you said some one had stole your bill of sale. Why pick on me? First I saw of you after the clem was your being nursed by Marion Fortescue. You were flat on your back behind the dressing room with your head in her lap and—"

Cuddy's unaccustomed right fist plumped into Calkins' meaty jaw. The surprised showman heeled over



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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a side rope and sprawled upon the ground. For the first time since his callow childhood Cuddy beheld blood of his own bringing. He shed his culture with his coat, leaped upon the prostrate showman and pounded him with all the strength of outraged virtue until Calkins yelled for help.

Jerry Miggins, connection man of the circus grifters, pulled the fighting Cuddy from the suffering showman. Then Jerry locked two apelike arms around the struggling youth and looked at his chief.

"What shall I do, Guv'ner? Run him off?"

Calkins wiped the blood from his face.

"Let him go," he said. "I'll settle this business with him myself. You fellows beat it."

Miggins and the other rescuers retreated into the menagerie tent. They understood Calkins. He liked to settle such matters in his own way—after dark. They didn't know that in a matter of a hundred seconds Cuddy had turned from college boy to cave man. Cuddy didn't know it himself, at first. What he said was:

"Calkins, bill of sale or no bill of sale, I'm boss of this show now. I'm taking full charge. I'll do all the counting up and handle all the money. I'll run every grifter off the lot before six o'clock, and this show'll be clean from now on." He advanced militantly upon the pursy showman who rubbed his bruised doublechin and backed off.

"Say," demanded Calkins, "how do you get that way?"

"I get that way, you cheap grifter," Cuddy barked at him, "because I'm sick of seeing you and Goldman's gang robbing women and children, to say nothing of the full-grown townsfolk and the country yokels who should know enough to take care of themselves. I'm sick of being a party to such rottenness, and I'm sick of seeing you trying to do me out of my own property. Some one on this circus has the bill of sale that shows I'm legal owner here. Until that turns up, and after, I'm going to own this show, in fact, if not in law. Do you get me, you big fat slob?"

Uncouth words from the mouth of the leader of the college cotillion. Cuddy did not recognize them nor himself, nor did he recognize the once white hand whose knuckles bled from abrasion against a showman's jaw. All Cuddy recognized was the idea of possession of the circus which was rightfully his, and possession of—two bright lanes forked from the highway of his life. At the end of one lane stood a tall dark girl in white sport clothes and bright red tam. She beckoned to him across a college campus. It was thus he had last seen Marjorie Dawson Trent. At the end of the other lane stood a small blonde girl in gingham dress and hair of Tuscan gold. She came gayly into the circus tent and waved a fresh good morning. It was thus he had first seen Marion Fortescue.

"Tell Goldman I want to see him in the ticket wagon," said Cuddy crisply, as he turned his back on the outbattled showman.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Goldman appeared at the wagon with miraculous speed.

"Goldman," said Cuddy to the chief grifter, "I'm boss now. Calkins has probably told you, so it'll be no news to you. The big news I wanted to give you is that you and your grifting gang are through with this show. If every one of you isn't off the lot by six o'clock to-night, I'll run you off. Do you get that? I'll run you off. And when the train pulls out to-night I'll be sure there isn't one of your gang on the privilege car. You'll get off this show and stay clear off or I'll put you away just as I did Fatty Frazier in Dawsville. Do you get me, Goldman?"

Goldman, the seasoned circus grifter, had reached his eminence in the underworld through resourcefulness. Without change of expression, as one whose life was merely a succession of crises, he quickly replied:

"You're quite right, Mr. Cotter. I'll do anything you say. I'm sick of the grifting business, anyway. I'll tell my boys not to work here any more. And I'll make arrangements to leave the show with them this afternoon, unless you can find something for us to do."

"There's nothing you can do for me but get out," said Cuddy, "except settle with Rony, here, for whatever you owe on privilege-car berths. Then you're done. And if there's any doubt in your mind about what I mean" (Cuddy exhibited his skinned knuckles) "I haven't broken any bones yet but I'm ready to break

## *A BLOW-OFF*

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some of mine and yours if you hesitate about being run away from this show."

How easily does fighting stock revert to form! Cuddy had forgotten that he was eligible to membership in the Sons of the Revolution. Goldman backed out of the ticket wagon in apologetic haste.

"Now, Rony," said Cuddy, addressing Rony Gavin, circus treasurer. "Let's you and I have a nice, friendly understanding. You've been working for Calkins and doing the things he wanted you to do. I don't hold that against you. That's business. Now you're working for me and you'll do the things I want you to do. Is that satisfactory?"

"Just what do you mean, Mr. Cotter?"

"You'll get a salary of fifty dollars a week as treasurer of this show. That's a pretty good salary as circus-treasurers' salaries go. There'll be mighty little walk-away from now on. You're to see that every towner gets the change he has coming. I'll make that easy for you, because if there is any walk-away I'll take it and not you. But I'll tell you this: The less walk-away there is in this wagon, the more salary I'm going to pay you. You probably think I'm a crazy simp but I'm going to try to prove to you and the rest of the people on this show that I'm not entirely a damn fool. What do you say? Do you accept my proposition?"

"If you're Guv'ner of this show now, what you say goes," Rony replied.

"All right. Show me your books and the cash."



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Rony hesitated.

"If you're in doubt as to who's boss at this circus, ask Calkins. There he is, out there in front of the side show, trying to put his head on straight."

Rony hastened to confer with his long-time chief. The debate was visible from the ticket wagon. It was brief. Gavin resumed his seat in the ticket wagon.

"You're Guv'ner, Mr. Cotter," he said. "Here are the books and here's the cash on hand."

"I'll count up with you, after this," said Cuddy, "and mind you, no walk-away."

"All right, Guv'ner."

"And, Rony."

"Yes, sir."

"You've been pretty square with me since I came on this show a plain simp."

"You didn't know anything about the business when you joined at Roanoke, Mr. Cotter."

"I've been a better student here than I was in college," said Cuddy. "And I'll just give you this little tip, Rony. You play the game with me and I'll make it worth your while."

"All right, Mr. Cotter." Cuddy took his copy of the cash slip and sallied forth to deliver his declaration of independence to the various department heads—and to greet the returning circus parade.

"I've done it," he announced to Miss Marion Fortescue as she turned her tandem team over to a stableman.

"Done what?"



## *A BLOW-OFF*

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"Declared myself boss and taken over the show."

"How?"

"By beating up Calkins and giving Goldman and his gang the run-off."

Miss Fortescue smiled at Cuddy and his tightened jaw, his steely eyes and his bloodstained fist.

"You are—what would your friends in college say? Oh, yes. You are increasing your vo-cab-u-lar-y."

"And my experience."

"Your great experience has just begun."

"I know it, Miss Fortescue." He eyed her eagerly.

"You'll have a great deal of trouble with Calkins and Goldman." She returned his gaze soberly.

"I'll fight them to a finish."

"Of course."

They entered the pad room. Manson, equestrian director, was preparing a principal horse for a riding rehearsal in the ring.

"By the way, Manson," said Cuddy, "please tell both dressing rooms that I'm Guv'ner now."

Manson looked at him dubiously.

"If you doubt it, ask Calkins," said Cuddy. "And, Manson."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll lead the parade after this."

"All right, sir," answered Manson. Cuddy marched toward the stables.

"Can you beat it!" said Manson to himself. "He comes on here a college simp less'n a week ago and now he's going to run the show—and lead the parade."

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Can you beat it? And they call this the show business! I give him three days before he's run off the lot."

In less than three hours, events on the circus lot proved that Marion Fortescue was a prophetess as well as a performer.

Cuddy dashed into trouble as soon as the side show opened to catch the after-parade crowd. Doc Inman was ballyhooing from an outside platform with the assistance of Sadie Smith, the Hindoo snake charmer from Hoboken. Doc called on heaven to witness that in all the world of freakdom there was no show like that within the tented walls. He slapped the gaudy banners with his eloquent cane and bade the negro band burst forth in brassy blare. The countryfolk, light and dark, surged forward to invest their quarters in the educating exhibit which awaited them. Nimble-fingered ticket sellers on raised ticket stands exchanged quarters for stiff, red admission tickets, the holders of which crowded through the roped aisle to the front door where a doorman took the tickets and dropped them through the tin slot of the side show ticket box.

Cuddy slipped along the side wall of the side show tent until he was close to the door, but out of the doorman's sight. That thrifty individual, seeing no sign of danger, palmed a handful of tickets, slipped them into his pocket instead of his ticket box, waited until there was a lull in business, then casually stepped out to the ticket seller's stand, and passed the palmed tickets back to the ticket seller.

"Ten," he said softly to the ticket seller.

The latter ran a practiced thumb over their edges. "Check," he replied, and sold them again, to their mutual profit.

The doorman reached his ticket box just as Cuddy's fist reached his left ear. The doorman sank to the grass back of the ticket box. Cuddy kicked him precisely.

"Go to the wagon and get your money. I'll take this door," announced the new circus boss.

The ex-doorman staggered toward the ticket wagon, occasionally casting an amazed look at Clarence Cuddington Cotter.

"I didn't know I had it in me," thought Cuddy as he deftly collected tickets from his cash customers. "Some of this bunch will certainly brain me before the day is done. But there's a lot of satisfaction in it while it lasts."

"No grift and no 'cooch' show, Doc." Cuddy issued this order as his side show manager passed through the side show door to lecture on the varied performance within. Cuddy experienced a certain thrill in issuing orders. He was astonished at the promptness with which they were obeyed. Doc Inman, who had been brought up on grift and "cooch" in a side show, had answered "Yes" to Cuddy's order, without a word of protest. Cuddy was congratulating himself on this easy victory as he stepped into the side show tent a few minutes later. Then he called all congratulations off.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Goldman's men were there in force. The swinging ball, the roll-down, the cologne joint, all the time-honored, crooked games were going at top speed. Cuddy dashed behind the canvas wall which curtained off the far end of the side show tent. There, just as usual, were the three-card-monte men and the three-shell men plying their profitable trade without any suggestion of hindrance or reform. Cuddy had no time to go into action here. Before he could start a clean-up, he heard the voice of Old Doc Inman on the other side of an extra partition which sheltered one of Calkins' pet indecencies, the "cooch" blow-off. Doc was bally-hooing to the suckers gathered there.

"Gentlemen," he said, "there are no ladies within this special inclosure because we advised you to leave them outside. This girl show is for men, only. And believe me, boys, you sports are going to see something. The real, genuine, red-hot dance from the Orient. Only fifty cents apiece, gents. If you want to stay, just throw the coin into my hat here. Those that are married, or talk in their sleep, or don't want to see somethin' rich, rare, and racy better go on outside. All set? Let's go, Fatima. Start the fireworks."

"Fatima," who had been adjusting his generous wig and his diaphanous costume, and the rest of his female impersonator make-up, appeared on the stage in the "cooch" inclosure, while two of the negro band obliged with an alleged Oriental air. But "Fatima" did not start the fireworks. Cuddy did. He fought with



bare fists, chairs, tent pegs, and bare fists again; whatever came handy. He tore down the partition walls and snatched off the "Oriental" dancer's wig, thus exposing that gentleman to the harsh criticism of a disillusioned group of village sports. He kicked the three-card-monte men and three-shell workers through the sidewall. He fought in haymaker fashion with the grifters, cappers, boosters, booster handlers and others of the crooked gentry clustered around the cologne joint, the swinging ball, the roll-down. The grifting clan gathered at the call of danger. Ed Bard, Jerry Miggins, Frisco Red, Oshkosh Phil and others of Goldman's grifters engaged the berserking Cuddy, each to bite the dust in turn. Finally Cuddy turned upon Goldman—who, as chief grifter, had stood at a safe distance and urged his cohorts to slaughter—and chased him down the country road.

It was a great battle while it lasted.

"Oi've seen many a clem in me toime," quoth Micky O'Mara of the stable forces, "but niver did I see wan more glorious than the Cuddy gentleman presided over this day. You mark me, that foine broth of a bye, for all he has no more than a hundred an' sixty pounds to his weight, is for being wan iv th' champeen prize fighters when he gits his growth."

"He lacks science now, but he has the wind and the footwork," admitted Pop McGinnis, boss canvasman.

"I saw nothing slow about his hands," chimed Chandelier Whitey, as he pottered around the light wagon getting ready for the evening performance.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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From his canvas chair in the main show entrance, Calkins beheld the tumult and heard the shouting without sign of excitement. "This won't last long," he muttered. "Manson'll fix that simp." And following a brief conference with his old-time chief, during which they agreed that Cuddy could best be handled by indirect methods, Montrose Manson, equestrian director, held Marion Fortescue against a wardrobe wagon behind the dressing room. "You stay away from that simp," he growled. "You stay away from him. If the grifters don't break his neck, I will. Y'understand?" Marion said nothing but she knew that the threat was not an idle one.

Cuddy, hero of his second fistic adventure, puffing mightily and mightily puffed up, not from pride but from punishment, was as wrecked as his own side show. That institution had been torn to ribbons by combatants and by escaping freaks and customers, who, finding themselves on common ground, competed for position in hurdle races and hundred-yard dashes. Cuddy's own clothing was merely a reminder of what once had been. One of his eyes was nearly closed and turning blue. His face was cut and scratched in a dozen places. His hands were skinned as if by a potato peeler. Had he entered his own college halls, no one would have recognized him, not even the campus cop.

Jules Towner, clown and pig trainer, led him to the pad room. A bareback rider brought a bucket of water, a horizontal bar performer stripped him to the

waist and rubbed him down. He heard the women performers on the other side of the pad room sounding his praises. Evidently most of the performers were with him. Marion Fortescue had told him they would be if he fought for a clean show.

"We're sick of sneaking from the lot to the train every night after the grifters have robbed the town-ers," she had said. "We work for our money honestly."

Cuddy had fought and bled.

"Will some one get me a shirt and some raw beef?" he mumbled through his thickening lips. "I've got to see what's going on this afternoon if I never see again." He carefully put tongue to teeth. Thank the Lord none of them had been knocked out. Cuddy was proud of his teeth. And he thought he might have to show them again.

He was still far from being a pretty thing when he encountered Calkins on the front door at the big show opening. With travail Cuddy had been able to eat a little dinner, but it had not been a comforting meal. "For a person who hasn't fought since childhood I must have done pretty well," he admitted to himself, "but they gave me all I wanted and a little more than I was ready to take."

Cuddy was just as mad when he saw Calkins in the afternoon as he had been when they had met in the morning.

"Why isn't Rony Gavin in the ticket wagon?" he demanded of Calkins, who rose hastily from his broad

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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canvas chair at the front door and sidled over toward the side wall.

"I don't know, Mr. Cotter. Where is Rony Gavin, Balter?"

"Gone down to the train, sick, Mr. Cotter," answered young and snappy Bings Balter, the press agent, his pockets bulging with local newspapers.

"Who's in the wagon in Gavin's place?"

"Eddie Atkins, the regular front-door man."

"And who's taking tickets in Eddie's place on the front door?"

"I'm all alone on the front door," said Balter.

"Will you grab a taxi, rush it to the train and bring back a report on Rony just as soon as you can, Bings?"

"Sure, Guv'ner," responded the press agent, ducking under the marquee ropes and losing himself in the crowd.

Cuddy swelled visibly. Bings Balter had addressed him by his official title in Calkins' hearing—the first time any one on the show had publicly so addressed him. That was very decent of Bings Balter. Cuddy would remember that. Excellent press agent was Balter. Should be getting more salary. Cuddy strutted—it was just a little strut, but a strut it was—over to his predecessor in high places.

"Calkins, you take the door for a while," said Cuddy. Then he went inside to see that everything was ready for the big show. He found a new man taking tickets on the reserved seats, and a new man selling reserved seats in the connection between menagerie and big top.

"Who sent you in here?" he demanded of each new job holder.

"Mr. Calkins," each answered.

Cuddy hurried back to the front door.

"Who are those new men on reserved-seat tickets?"

"A couple of substitutes," Calkins answered.

"Where are the regular men?" Cuddy demanded.

"Both down to the train, sick. Somethin' wrong with the cookhouse grub yesterday."

Cuddy cross-examined the circus steward.

"My records show every one else on the lot well but Gavin, and the two men on reserved seats. Couldn't have been anything wrong with the grub," protested the steward.

Cuddy made a hurried tour of the lot and found the steward's statement correct. But he didn't get back to the front door in time to see Calkins pass two hundred general-admission tickets back from the front door to the ticket wagon, nor to see the new reserved-seat ticket taker pass a hundred reserved tickets back from the reserved-seat section to the reserved-seat ticket seller at the connection between menagerie and big top. Calkins was aware of both transactions. He was "in" on them. The resale would not appear in the official count but the proceeds would, in the pockets of Calkins and his co-conspirators. They were "trimming the simp."

As Cuddy reached the front door, a pony "punk" approached him.

"Miss Fortescue wants to see you," the boy said.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Cuddy glanced at the remains of his watch. The remains said the hour was 1:55. He walked rapidly around menagerie and big top to the pad room.

"Please tell Miss Fortescue I am here," he told old Jenny Adams, the wardrobe woman.

"All right, Guv'ner," Mrs. Adams reported.

Ah! there it was again! The Adams woman had addressed him as Guv'ner. Ah, well. She was a good woman and a good seamstress in the bargain. He must not forget about her.

After five minutes Miss Fortescue appeared.

"Did you send for me?" he asked.

"When, Mr. Cotter?"

"Just now."

"Oh, dear me, no. There must be some mistake. I would never ask you to come back to the pad room when you should be watching the front door." She seemed quite distressed about it. "Who told you I wanted you?" she demanded.

"Some pony 'punk' from the pad room."

"Please hurry back to the front door. I heard that Rony Gavin's not in the wagon. This is part of a scheme to trim you on the ticket count-up." She fairly pushed him out of the pad room.

Cuddy ran for the main entrance. But Calkins and Eddie Atkins were quicker than he. Another two hundred tickets had passed from front door to ticket wagon there to be sold again—for the benefit of the "trimming" pair. While Cuddy was trying to prevent that leak, the reserved-seat ticket taker passed

back to the reserved-seat ticket seller another hundred tickets—also to be resold for the benefit of that pair of “trimmers” and Calkins who participated in both “trims.”

“Rony Gavin’s in the train, sick, Guv’ner. Looks like he’s been doped,” Balter reported.

“I’ll settle with you for all of this,” said Cuddy to the cringing Calkins.

Cuddy was dismayed that afternoon when he counted the tickets in the reserved-seat ticket box and found there were, apparently, only two hundred and sixty-four persons occupying five hundred well-filled seats. He was still more dismayed when he counted the general admission tickets. He had guessed at two thousand, four hundred dollars as the receipts on the “front door.” The count of tickets showed total front-door receipts of only eight hundred dollars.

“I’m not a regular treasurer, you know, Guv’ner,” said Eddie Atkins. “But this count tallies with my cash and the tickets in my rack. So I must be all right.”

“Looks that way,” admitted Cuddy, ruefully.

Many towners stayed for the afternoon concert. Business was good at the evening side show opening. The big top was crowded for the evening performance. But Cuddy found, on counting up after the evening performance began, the same paucity of cash as in the afternoon.

## VIII

### THE BLOW-DOWN

THERE was trouble all over the lot that evening. Little fights started up, no one knew how, in every direction. Some one was always sending for "Guv'ner Cotter." Cuddy hot-footed from fight to fight. He paused at one place to put out a fire in the hay left by the stable men. At another to settle a row around the red-hot stand. The cookhouse wagon bogged in a ditch getting off the lot and that incident demanded his personal attention. A storm was coming up from the west. Cuddy was tired and worried. His first day as boss of his own show had been a trying one. He hurried into the ticket wagon to count up.

"Shall I take this money down to Rony Gavin's stateroom and turn it over to him?" asked Eddie Atkins, when the count was verified.

"All right," said Cuddy. "Pop McGinnis says we'll have to tear down in a hurry to-night. There's a blow coming."

It had been a hot, stifling day and a hotter and more stifling night. "Ideal circus weather," as Pop Mc-

## *THE BLOW-DOWN*

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Ginnis put it. For your circus patrons come in greater throngs when the heat is most oppressive. The hotter the weather the better the business. The flags at the pole tops had hung limp against their staffs all day long. Men and horses had suffered in sun and shade—even the elephants and cat animals had complained of the heat in their own peculiar ways. No respite came with the setting sun; only the promise of something cooler. That promise took the form of a bank of clouds slowly lifting over the western horizon. Lightning played among the clouds as they advanced.

"We'll get a twister and a soaker to-night but it's better than just naturally melting to death," remarked the boss property man, as he pulled on his slicker and cautioned his assistants to get out all the tarpaulins and to see that none of the performers' stuff got wet.

The grand entrée, trick-riding acts, Japanese balancing acts had passed, and the feature act of the Five Flying Fortescues had reached its sensational finale, when the circus mail-agent handed Cuddy a letter. Without looking at it, Cuddy tucked it into his pocket. He stood in the center of the tent as Marion completed her triple somersault from the dome of the canvas and responded to the packed tent's applause. The performing elephants had been led into the ring for their act. The evening program was running rapidly and smoothly. The only sound that warned the circus people of danger was the rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat of McGinnis' rough-neck gang as they sledge hammered the extra tent stakes into the ground outside. There



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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wasn't any wind up to that minute. Then with a bang the twister hit the circus lot.

There was a ripping of canvas, snapping of poles, smashing of seats, trumpeting of elephants, screaming of women—and darkness and a deluge of water descended upon the wreck of Calkins' show and upon three thousand human beings fighting beneath a flattened, sodden canvas.

When the storm struck, Cuddy instinctively ran toward the wind and the dressing room exit, dodging falling poles as he went. He reached the exit as the big tent collapsed. The dressing room went down with it. Every light on the lot went out. The performers, trained by years of trouping for such emergencies, had scurried for the open, most of them in rubber coats. Behind him Cuddy heard the squealing of the frightened elephants as they tore aside canvas, poles, seats and wreckage and stampeded into the night. He also heard a girl's voice, or thought he heard it, calling: "Steady, King. Steady, Rajah. Steady, Baldy," as the big bulls pounded out of sight and hearing. Flash lights appeared in the hands of McGinnis and other department men. Other lights flashed in the hands of some of the performers. The canvasmen, seat men, property men and other workmen of the show began a rapid unlacing of the canvas sections of the big top. Hundreds crawled like rats through the openings thus made or through holes already torn in the canvas. Circus men followed, bearing limp forms

## *THE BLOW-DOWN*

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of women and children, trampled on, struck by poles, suffocated or in swoon.

Cuddy darted from group to group of the performers, looking for Marion. No one had seen her after the blow-down.

"She was just taking her bow in the center ring, right in front of you, when the blow-down came," Jules Turner, the clown, told him. "That's the last I saw of her."

Cuddy continued his search. He put the question to Bill Rhodes, boss hostler.

"She's probably with the bulls. They'll listen to her when Weed, the bull man, can't handle them," he suggested.

"Any idea which way they went?"

"Somewhere in that direction. Maybe running yet," said Bill, pointing vaguely over his shoulder.

Cuddy plunged into the darkness. He fell over wagon tongues, nearly broke his legs on tent stakes, cut his hands on barbed-wire fences. Then, down at a corner of the lot in a little group of trees, he found the elephants and Marion.

She stood there, in her rain-soaked, ring costume, surrounded by her gigantic pets, talking, talking, talking to them. Cuddy called to her. She recognized his voice.

"Don't come in here," she warned him. "These bulls are all right with me. I'll get them to the cars. You go back on the lot where you belong. You'll have enough to do to-night. Just tell Weed where I

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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am and tell him to bring me a slicker. That's all. I'm going to put these elephants to bed."

Marion spoke with the wisdom of her twenty years and especially of her ten years of trouping, when she warned Cuddy that he would have plenty to do on the circus lot that night. A circus blow-down is no tea party to an old-timer. To a novice it is catastrophe.

Soaked to the skin, knee-deep in water, surrounded by a mass of twisted poles, ropes, canvas and miscellaneous circus paraphernalia, struggling and swearing workmen, struggling and hysterical towners, Cuddy gazed about over the fallen estate which had been his less than twelve hours.

His little army of workers was back of him—that was one consolation. True to the traditions of their calling, the bosses and their mud-covered helpers were sorting the remnants of Cuddy's stock in trade and hoisting them into their proper wagons. Chandelier Whitey managed to get a few coal-oil torches going. In their dim and flickering light, the rough-necks worked desperately to salvage such as might be salvaged from the blow-down. And when each wagon had its load, and sixteen horses could not move it through the mud, Weed was called upon to bring the most reliable and least nervous of the bulls from the elephant car so that they might do their extra bit by pushing.

## IX

### THE BLOW-UP

THREE o'clock had struck in the Dundonald's courthouse tower before trainmaster Galva Green had the last wagon on the train, the wagon runs pulled up on the flats, the chuck blocks spiked under each wagon wheel, the pull-up team stowed in the stock car.

"Any chance of getting the show up on the lot to-morrow?"

Cuddy leveled this question at Boss Canvasman McGinnis, when that general and his squad of muddy stake and chain men reached the train at the tail of the chandelier wagon.

"Tell you better to-morrow, Guv'ner. A blow-down's a blow-down. To-night's was a peach. If we have enough extra center poles on the train, we may be able to cut it. I dunno." McGinnis was not much on promises. Performance was his long suit.

Cuddy climbed into the privilege car, made sure that the stud poker and crap games had gone the way of the Goldman grifting gang, and sat down to a cup of coffee. He was fagged, and breathing hard. He felt twice his twenty-one years. His thoughts turned



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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fondly toward his stateroom, still shared with Calkins. He could sleep anywhere to-night if he only had a chance. He started toward his berth. A razorback of the trainmaster's crew stopped him with:

"Excuse me, Guv'ner, but Mr. Green wants to see you on the back platform."

Cuddy stepped to the rear platform of the privilege car and peered into the watery night.

"Sorry, Guv'ner," Green said out of the darkness. "The show's attached on account of injuries in the blow-down."

"What does that mean?" demanded Cuddy.

A deputy sheriff handed him a summons. Cuddy glanced at it. He wasn't much up on attachments of that character. Green, who knew them well, pointed out the vital words: "Damages—five thousand dollars. Good and sufficient bond—fifteen thousand dollars."

"You have to pay the damages or give the bond before the show leaves town," explained the veteran trainmaster. "We'll have to pull out pretty quick if we make the next town—Chatman—by sun-up. It's a seventy-mile run and we'll not average more than twenty miles an hour over these railroad grades."

"What'll I do, Green?"

"Better see Mr. Calkins, Guv'ner," suggested the trainmaster. "Maybe he carried a blanket surety bond. He used to. In that case you just call up the local lawyer for the surety company and he'll have a bond fixed up in no time. Most shows carry a surety bond

now so the towners can't hold them up or shake them down."

Cuddy made his way through the rain-soaked and pie-eating rough-necks of the privilege car to his state-room, and shook Calkins by the shoulder.

"The show's attached," he said to the drowsy Calkins. "What surety bond are you carrying?"

"Haven't had a surety bond this season," Calkins said from the depths of his berth. "Fatty Frazier used to square all the shakes or kicks that came along."

"And Frazier's in jail in Dawsville."

"That's where you put him, Mr. Cotter," was Calkins' rejoinder as he rolled over and snored "Good-night" to his successor.

Cuddy reported lack of progress to his trainmaster.

"Maybe Rony Gavin has enough cash in his treasurer's safe to square this attachment," suggested the resourceful Green.

Cuddy aroused Rony, still a bit flighty from the dope administered to him by some unfriendly hand. Cuddy outlined his dilemma.

"I had two thousand three hundred and forty-two dollars and thirty-two cents in cash this morning when I was carried from the ticket wagon," Rony said. "Some one said your orders were to turn the wagon over to Eddie Atkins. I was too far gone to question that."

"How much did Eddie turn in to you here after I counted with him in the wagon during the night show?" asked Cuddy.

That question left Rony wide awake.

"No one has turned any cash over to me to-day. I haven't seen any one since Bings Balter came down from the lot this morning to ask me how I was getting along. I've just laid here too sick to move. Haven't you got the day's cash, Guv'ner?"

Cuddy gasped.

"I told Eddie Atkins to turn it over to you," he said.

"If Eddie isn't on the train, you're trimmed," was Rony's laconic response.

Cuddy searched the men's sleeping cars. None of the porters, none of the few circus men still awake had seen Atkins. The rain still fell on the waiting circus train. Cuddy carried the news to Rony.

"Eddie's ducked away from the show and taken the jack. You're flat and the show's blown up," was Rony's pronouncement.

Cuddy sank to the edge of Rony's berth. Elbows on knees he tried to prop up his tired head. That head refused to register a thought. He was all in. He leaned against the end of Rony's berth. His hands dropped from his head to his sides. As his right hand slipped over his breast it encountered the crumpled letter he had thrust into his pocket just before the blow-down. Mechanically Cuddy pulled the letter out. It was soggy and blurred by the rain. He switched on the electric light above his head, and recognized the writing of Marjorie Dawson Trent. Still mechanically, he straightened out the wrinkled, water-streaked pages and read:

## THE BLOW-UP

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"DEAREST CUDDY:

"Although no new word has reached me from you, I know you are very near to me, even though you went so swiftly and silently away. Every night you come to me in my sleep and you are just the same old sweet, courageous Cuddy. Nothing that may happen can ever change the days we had together, can ever let us forget that we were made for, and promised to, each other. And so I pray for you, Cuddy, and wait for you and I know that you'll soon come back to me and to all your friends and mine. Every one misses you so. I didn't go to the big spring formal. I couldn't—without you. The campus is so green and the lake so blue—because spring makes them so. But they are not the green and the blue they would be if you were with me. Commencement week will soon be here, with the ivy planting, the old reunions and the final walks over the hill. You'll come back for that, surely. We all look for you. I wake up every morning feeling that you must be here. I go to sleep every night knowing that you must, you must come back to us to-morrow. Does this sound like a love letter? I never loved you so much as I do to-night. And I shall love you more as the days go by.

"MARJORIE."

There was a knock at the stateroom door. "Some one to see you, Guv'ner," the sleepy porter announced.

Cuddy stepped outside and almost on to the toes of Marion Fortescue. She was fully and dryly dressed, as fresh of face and trim of figure as if blow-downs and elephant hunts in the dark were part of her daily circus curriculum. Cuddy had barely noted this miracle before she said:

"What's holding up the train?"



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Cuddy explained matters.

"Is there a telephone in the railroad station? Got any money?"

"I think so," Cuddy said. "About money—about three hundred and fifty dollars."

"Let me use it, please." He handed her his last cent.

Guided by Galva Green, the trainmaster, they crossed the wet and gleaming tracks and slippery wooden platform and entered the dingy station. The deputy sheriff accompanied them. Marion spoke briefly to the station agent.

"Come in here, ma'am, and use my 'phone," he said.

Marion motioned to Cuddy and Green and the deputy sheriff to remain in the waiting room. They waited nearly an hour. Cuddy drowsed. Mind and body yielded to exhaustion and the heat from the soft-coal stove. The deputy sheriff remained alert, waiting for some showman's trick. Green, refreshed from his day-long sleep, paced the floor, fuming because his train could not move. Every ten minutes he glanced at his watch.

"Engine coupled on, everything loaded, next town seventy miles away, show all shot to pieces from a blow-down. Should be in the next town with my runner planks down and ready to unload right now. We'll be three hours' late into Chatman, if we get there at all. There sure is some jinx on this show." He continued this low-toned monologue without interrup-

tion, until a snappy-looking young man breezed into the station.

"Where's Miss Marion Fortescue?" he demanded.

Green indicated the station agent's office and continued his walk. The deputy sheriff exchanged greetings with the new arrival as that gentleman vanished through the office door. Before Cuddy had fully awakened to the situation, the deputy sheriff was summoned into the office. Snatches of crisp conversation penetrated the wooden partition.

"This is a perfectly good bond, sheriff."

"Yes—but—"

"You know my standing as an attorney. You know the signatures on this bond are genuine. You know these bondsmen are perfectly good."

"Yes—but—"

"Then there is no other formality required." There was much decision in the attorney's voice.

"You forget my interest in this matter." It was the station agent speaking.

"What's that?" snapped the attorney.

"I must have, for the railroad, three hundred and twenty-five dollars to cover the haul to Chatman before this circus train moves out of these yards."

"Here it is. Give me your receipt—on the circus contract."

Cuddy recognized Marion's voice.

The group emerged from the station agent's office.

"This is Guv'ner Cotter, sole proprietor and manager of Calkins' Circus," announced Miss Fortescue,

bringing forward the snappy young attorney. "Guv'ner Cotter, this is Franklin Desmond, distinguished Dundonald attorney. Mr. Desmond has kindly arranged a surety bond for us. Here's your railroad receipt. Good night, sheriff. Let us know when you want the case heard, Mr. Desmond. Am very sorry to have gotten you out on such a night as this. Here's your change, Mr. Cotter. Good night, Mr. Agent. Thank you all very much. Glad you remembered me from last season, Mr. Desmond."

"Let's go," urged the restless trainmaster, swinging his lantern in anticipation of giving the long-looked-for starting signal.

"Just a minute," said Cuddy. "What's the rate—straight wire rate—to New York, Mr. Agent?"

"Fifty cents for ten words."

"Ten will be enough," said Cuddy. He seized a telegram blank and scratched feverishly. "Send this, straight," he ordered, producing a half dollar.

Cuddy, Miss Fortescue, and Green tramped back across the shining tracks. Cuddy helped her up the steps of the women's sleeping car, then made his way to the rear platform of the train. Green was hanging from the steps signaling the railroad man's equivalent for "full speed ahead."

Presently the trainmaster joined his boss. The last train truck clicked over a switch frog and rolled toward the open country and Chatman. There were signs of daybreak in the east.

"Pardon me, Guv'ner," Green was shouting into

## *THE BLOW-UP*

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Cuddy's ear. "Pardon me, Guv'ner, but I'm an old, old trouper and I've a kind of fatherly interest in you. You've got the makings of a showman, but you need watching. You don't have to tell me unless you want to, but what message did you send just now, just before we pulled out?"

"It was to my Uncle Ned, a New York lawyer," shouted Cuddy in Green's good ear. "It said: 'Marion Fortescue is the eighth wonder of the world.' "

"I'll say she is," shouted Green, the trainmaster. Then he added: "You better turn in now, Guv'ner. I'll call you when we pull into Chatman."

Less than a minute later, Cuddy tumbled into his berth with his boots on, dead to the world. In his pocket, just over his heart, rested the letter from Marjorie Dawson Trent.



## X

### OUT OF THE MUD

CUDDY COTTER, late of Columbus College, contemplated the wreck of his family fortune, just arrived in Chatman from the blow-down in Dundonald.

According to the brilliant posters decorating adjacent billboards, the multicolored legends on adjoining railroad cars, and gold-leaf lettering on many animal cages and baggage wagons, the official name of this fortune was Calkins' Classical Circus, 'Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair. But names meant nothing to Cuddy that morning.

What boots it to be the owner of a circus if owner and circus are broke? If a previous night's blow-down has played havoc with tents, poles, ropes, seats, rigging, lions, elephants and personnel? And there is no apparent prospect of bringing order out of chaos and reëstablishing the circus as a going concern?

Mechanically, Galva Green and his train crew were rolling wagons off the flat cars, down the steel runways, onto the ground. Mechanically, Pop McGinnis and his canvasmen were tumbling out of their sleeping

## OUT OF THE MUD

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cars and plodding through the mud toward the circus grounds. Mechanically, Bill Rhodes and his hostler were bringing the horses out of the stock cars, hitching them onto wagons and starting for the lot. Mechanically, Watertown Weed, boss bull-man, was standing by with the circus elephants to see if they might be needed to push the heavy wagons up the hill from the railroad tracks. The water dripped from tarpaulins and rubber coats, but the work went on.

Once put a circus in motion and it takes more than a blow-down and wet weather to stop its momentum. About the only thing that will stop it is the lack of money.

Cuddy, standing by the runways in his dripping slicker, wondered where he could find two thousand seven hundred dollars. That was the minimum he would need to meet the expenses of his circus that day, whether any one came to the show or not. And most of the two thousand seven hundred dollars might be required before breakfast. He knew that as soon as he reached the lot he would be called upon to pay for cookhouse and stable food, state, city and county license, ground rental, gasoline for the circus lights, ropes, canvas, poles, stakes and other material for repairs. There would be a dozen emergency bills because of last night's storm. These must be paid in cash, in addition to which he would probably receive an urgent request to wire six hundred dollars or so to the advertising brigade a thousand miles away and two weeks in advance of the show. The advance brigade was

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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always wiring for money. And Manson had reported four crippled ring horses.

It happened that when Cuddy waded on to the waterlogged lot at Chatman, the sun broke through the clouds just as he encountered Marion.

"You didn't have much rest last night, Mr. Cotter," she greeted him.

"You were up as late as I—until the train pulled out of Dundonald after four o'clock this morning," he answered. Then he added, enviously: "But I don't see how you can bob up this morning looking like a freshly budded rose."

"And I don't see how you can have the courage to pay me a compliment on a rainy morning when your show's all shot to pieces," she replied with a smile.

"Won't you break down under the strain of trouping?" he asked.

"Not I," she replied. "I sleep all day Sunday."

"How did you perform that miracle in Dundonald?" he asked.

"No miracle about that," she answered. "Mr. Desmond is a circus fan. He'll do anything for a circus. He was on the lot in Dundonald, but I guess you didn't meet him. All us troupers know him. He'll stall that damage case along until next winter. Then you can go back to Dundonald and settle it on your own terms. And now that the show is here in Chatman?"

They moved into the shade of a rising side wall. Pop McGinnis and the other heroes of many a struggle

## *OUT OF THE MUD*

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with the elements were bringing order out of the wreckage.

"And now that the show is here in Chatman?" Cuddy repeated her question. "Here the show stays, unless I accomplish some financial sleight of hand. No money in the ticket wagon, no money in the safe, practically no money in the manager's pocket and probably no money in the company, anywhere. And to increase the tenseness of the situation—" He consulted a letter the circus mail-agent placed in his hands. "I have here a report from my twenty-four-hour man. It says, 'I was unable to get a license from the city council of Chatman because The Chatman Commercial Club is holding a Trade Exposition on the fair grounds on our date and they don't want any competition from traveling shows.' Now that, I should say," Cuddy tapped the letter with an unmanicured forefinger, "will about break this camel's back."

"What else does he say?" Miss Fortescue inquired.

"He suggests," Cuddy resumed after further reading of the twenty-four-hour man's report, "that I have Fatty Frazier fix the city council in some way. And Fatty Frazier lies in the dungeon of Dawsville, with my knowledge and consent, in fact, at my insistent demand!"

"Your first job," Miss Fortescue suggested, "will be to get Rony Gavin back in the ticket wagon. He should be all well again now. Let him handle all the orders against the show that come in from food men, lot owners, local contractors and the like, until you



find a way out of the mud. Until you do have some plan, I think you should keep out of sight. I must get to the dressing room and see how much water got into my trunk last night. 'There's Rony now.' She beckoned to the circus treasurer as that wan gentleman picked his way across the muddy lot. Then she turned to her own business of the day, pausing a moment to pat the trunks of the elephants she had rescued from stampede and safely convoyed to the elephant car during the storm of the previous night.

"Rony, have you ever been treasurer of a busted show before?"

"Sure, Mr. Cotter," said the experienced treasurer.

"What's the first move?" Cuddy demanded.

"First move is for the Guv'ner, which is you, to get under cover."

"How about all these feed and other local bills which have to be paid?"

"I'll tell the towners that they'll be settled as soon as you come on the lot."

"And what'll I be doing in the meantime?"

"I hope you'll be down at the telegraph station wiring to some one for money."

"I don't know any one to whom I can wire."

"Then we'll have to think up something else. My stall will be only good until after breakfast. By that time the towners will be getting uneasy. But don't you get that way, Mr. Cotter.

"Some one around the show will think of a way out. Kind of sorry Fatty Frazier isn't here. He was the

greatest fixer I ever knew. Calkins would have been crippled without him. Calkins isn't any good by himself. You found that out yesterday. And didn't you put up some fight!" Rony gazed at his young boss with frank admiration. Then he added with some hesitation: "But you really should have some personal repairs made. You're pretty badly marked, Guv'ner."

"I've bigger troubles than that on my mind." Cuddy was thinking of the most pressing problem. Somehow he must get a circus license from the city council. If he could manage to make a parade and get the doors of the circus open he might gather in enough money to tide himself over his present crisis. He wished he knew something about legitimate fixing.

Pop McGinnis, boss canvasman, presented himself.

"Some crew of able seamen on this circus, Guv'ner. They haul this wreck out of the mud, patch up her seams, splice up the busted masts, take a few half hitches around the tent stakes and there you are—a big top that'll partly keep the sun out, a menagerie that'll partly keep the rain out, and a sidewall that'll keep the crowd out if they don't push too hard against it." He bit into his plug of chewing tobacco with enthusiasm.

Cuddy choked. "McGinnis," he said, with his hand on the tough old trouper's shoulder, "if I ever get out of this mess alive, I'll give you and your boys a reward that'll surprise you."

"That's all right, Guv'ner," the aged canvasman replied. "After the way you ran the grifters off the

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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lot yesterday, me and my rough-necks will stay with you as long as there's any staying done."

"Shake on that, McGinnis," said Cuddy, and his fresh young hand clasped the horny old fist of the master of canvas and rope, the chief of the dwellers in tents.

"Better duck, Guv'ner," Rony whispered in Cuddy's ear as several individuals not of the circus company bore down upon them. "I can recognize a man with a feed bill farther than he can see me." Cuddy raised the sidewall and disappeared in the menagerie tent.

"If those fellows weren't so loyal to me, I'd run away from the whole thing," Cuddy said to himself. "But I can't quit them when they don't quit me, and I can't leave them flat when they look to me for a living. But how?" Cuddy sat down upon a bale of hay behind the cages and tried to think of some one he knew who would let him have two thousand seven hundred dollars—by wire.

Uncle Ned might. No, that was out of the question. He knew his lawyer uncle too well. Uncle Ned, in turning over to Cuddy a bill of sale of Calkins' circus, had been very careful to tell Cuddy that Cuddy was on his own. As far as Uncle Ned was concerned, Cuddy could make or break himself with his bill of sale for Calkins' circus. With the exception of his Uncle Ned, Cuddy knew few men of affairs.

His college chums were in the same remittance class as he had been. Such money as they received was as manna from heaven. Plenty of it descended upon

## OUT OF THE MUD

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them, but none of it stuck. Not one of them would think of having two thousand seven hundred dollars in the bank. Or if they had that much, they wouldn't think of sending it by wire to Cuddy. They would not consider it if Cuddy offered as security for the loan a circus which he did not legally own.

Cuddy wondered who had robbed him of his bill of sale during his first day with Calkins' circus. Probably Sol Goldman, the chief of the grafters. Well—Goldman had been run away from the show by the might of Cuddy's unaccustomed fist. That fist, with what steam Cuddy could put back of it, kept Cuddy at the head of the circus camp. But all the steam in the world couldn't keep him there without money. Wasn't there any one else he could turn to? He fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette—and produced Marjorie Trent's letter—the rain-streaked letter which had reached him just before the blow-down the night before.

Cuddy opened the letter once more. "I'm praying for you," his college sweetheart had written. Cuddy read the whole letter over again. He wished he knew how he could answer it. Marjorie expected him to come back to college—to her. She was certainly loyal to him, when all the evidence she could see must be dead against him. There was nothing he could do about that now. He was on his own. Until he fought his way out of his difficulties, he must write to no one of the old crowd; especially he must not write to Marjorie. But he would keep her letter. That would



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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be one tie that bound him to the old life. He felt far from fit. He needed a shave, new linen, a new suit. Five days of strenuous circusing had scraped off most of his polish. He was a gentleman, still, but lacked most of the outward manifestations of gentleness. And he was hungry and broke, and in hiding.

For an hour or more Cuddy remained in his brown study. Rony Gavin had told him to keep under cover and think of some way out of the dilemma in which the show found itself. But Cuddy could find no loophole of escape. If some one else on the show could discover a way out, well and good. As far as he was concerned, his back was to the wall and he was all through fighting—unless he might sell his red roadster left behind at Columbus College!

A bugle call—the call which always meant “Get ready for parade”—made him spring to his feet. He rushed through the menagerie and big top, out through the dressing-room entrance and pad room, out into the warm sunshine of the southern spring.

“Where’s Manson?” he demanded of a group of performers.

“Here, Guv’ner,” the equestrian director answered, hurrying up from the horse tents. Cuddy did not conceal his dislike for him.

“What do you mean by calling parade? We haven’t got any license for this town yet.” Cuddy was more worried than he realized. Bad enough to stay on the lot without being able to open the show, but to attempt a parade without a license, and have that parade

stopped, and, perhaps, some one on the show jailed for making such an attempt, that would be one more trouble that he could not stand that morning.

"Rony Gavin told me to go ahead. Said you were sick. Told me he had the license in the ticket wagon," Manson explained.

"If Gavin said it, it goes," announced Cuddy, the new Guv'ner of the show.

Cuddy did the hundred yards between pad room and ticket wagon in ten flat.

"What's this about sending out the parade, Rony?" Cuddy burst in upon his treasurer.

"Oh, yes, Guv'ner," Rony replied. "I didn't know where you were, it was getting late and—perhaps, if you don't mind, you better sign this document as owner and manager of Calkins' Circus, Guv'ner."

"This" was a contract between the Chatman Chamber of Commerce and Calkins' Circus by which the circus agreed to give afternoon and evening performances that day in Chatman under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce. Receipts were to be divided equally between the circus and the Chatman Chamber of Commerce. But the Chamber of Commerce guaranteed Calkins' Circus four thousand dollars on the day, and the Chamber of Commerce agreed to assume all local expenses, including that of licenses.

Cuddy signed it with a flourish.

"Who in heaven's name put that over?" exclaimed

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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the rising young circus manager as he began to breathe again the breath of managerial life.

"There was a special meeting of the Chatman Chamber of Commerce this morning," Rony explained. "The Chamber of Commerce was impressed with the advantage of having so fine a circus as Calkins' in their beautiful city. They were told something about our enormous receipts in other southern cities. They were also advised that, if proper arrangements were made, they could have the mile-long street pageant of Calkins' Circus, etc., wind its glittering way not only through the main thoroughfares of the city, but also through the fair grounds where the Trade Exposition is being held. They were also told that, for a consideration, some of our trained animal acts would be given, free of charge, before the assembled hosts at the Trade Exposition at five o'clock this afternoon. Incidentally, the Chamber was sold on the possibility of making a nice piece of change from sharing in the day's income of Calkins' Circus, etc. After all of which, the Chamber, through its president, secretary and treasurer, as you will see, signed on the dotted line—just as you have done."

"Yes. Yes. I get all that," exclaimed Clarence Cuddington Cotter, the world's youngest circus impresario. "I get all that. But who put it over? Who framed the Chamber meeting, drew up the contract, and made the speech? Some one did some tall talking."

"Oh, as for that," replied Mr. Rony Gavin, circus

treasurer, "Bings Balter, the press agent, and your humble servant helped some. But Marion Fortescue made the speech. All we got to do now is to see that we collect our guaranty before the show pulls out to-night. You'll notice," continued the treasurer, "that clause six in the contract stipulates that half the guaranty shall be paid at the end of the afternoon performance and half at the end of the night performance."

"Where did you get that cash?" Cuddy demanded.

The circus treasurer laid his hands affectionately upon a pile of coin and bills at one side of his ticket window. "I nearly forgot to call your attention to clause ten of the contract, Guv'ner," he said. "Under clause ten the Chatman Chamber of Commerce advanced us five hundred dollars as evidence of good faith!"

"Good Lord!" said Cuddy as he collapsed on a convenient camp stool near the door and waved feebly at the parade leaving the lot.

Cuddy collected one thousand, five hundred dollars more from the Chatman Chamber of Commerce at the close of the afternoon performance. There wasn't much money left for the Chatmanites who had boosted so valiantly for the circus, but the Chamber of Commerce Committee were good sports.

"You took a lot of people out to our Exposition with your parade this morning, and you'll take a lot out to our show with your free animal acts this after-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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noon. And we'll pack your tent to-night, so we'll both get some money." Thus spoke the chairman.

"I'm sending the elephants and ponies, Manson with his high-school horses, and the trained seals down to your trade show right now," said Cuddy. "Put these acts on in front of your grand stand, with my compliments."

"Aren't you going to send Miss Fortescue?" the committee demanded in one voice. Cuddy hesitated.

"I'm afraid she's pretty tired," he said.

"But she promised to come. That's one reason we signed the contract. She said she'd work the elephants."

"That settles it, gentlemen. If she promised to come, she'll be there without any orders from me." And she was.

## XI

### THE BIG SQUEEZE

WHILE the Calkins Circus free acts were keeping Cuddy's part of the contract with the Chatman Chamber of Commerce at the Chatman Fair Grounds, Cuddy was rearranging his line of battle on the circus lot. In response to his call, his staff man and his department bosses were gathered about him under the marquee.

"Now that I'm Guv'ner on this show," Cuddy announced, "you'll want to know how the new organization will be framed. Rony Gavin is promoted to be assistant general manager. Bings Balter will have charge of the front door and of all tickets. Doc Inman stays in charge of the side show, which will be without any games or any 'cooch' hereafter. Pop McGinnis stays in charge of canvas, Manson continues as equestrian director—but, Manson, whenever I'm on the show after this I, and not you, lead the parade." Cuddy cast a questioning glance toward Manson. It was a test order.

There was a tense moment. Every one present sensed the crisis impending. Every one knew there was no love lost between the two.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Manson glanced at Calkins as if for guidance. Another moment passed. "All right, Guv'ner," replied the master of circus ceremonies.

"That's about all," continued Cuddy, "except that there'll be no more grift on this show. No more short change. No more silver men. No more crap games. No more roulette. No more three-card monte. No more stud poker. No more shell stuff. This is going to be a Sunday school show. Strictly clean. If anybody on this show wants to argue that matter with me at any time, I'll be glad to meet him, with or without gloves."

There were murmurs in the shuffling group. Most of the bosses were evidently anxious to be off, for the tearing-down hour approached. They must get ready to move to the next day's town—that magnet that draws the circus man onward and ever onward. But a speech seemed to be in order. The old-timers, trained in the command of men and conditions, softly sidled toward the edge of the gathering. Speech making was out of their line. Then, the pack instinct dominating, they fell upon old Pop McGinnis and forced him to the center. "Say something, Pop," they demanded.

Pop, who faced a cyclone, a mob scene, or a water-spout without fear or favor, who feasted upon private conversation, shrank from the hideous ordeal of oratory. He spat to the right, spat to the left. He pulled off his old felt hat, once black, now green with the memories of many seasons in sun and rain. He ad-

## THE BIG SQUEEZE

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vanced one old, high-laced boot. Withdrew it. Advanced its mate. He cleared his throat with a rasp that spoiled the afternoon nap for most of the animals in the menagerie. Then he made his mighty effort.

"We're damn glad you're Guv'ner, and we'll stay with you," he shouted. And the speech was over. the circus men, satisfied with so elaborate an observance of ceremony, scattered to their various fields of endeavor.

Cuddy caught sight of Calkins. The one-time owner and manager of Calkins' Circus had remained modestly in the background, his fat frame supported by a sidepole of the marquee. Cuddy walked over to him. Cuddy's fists usually doubled when he got near Calkins. They closed again this time.

"You can stay on the show and help at odd jobs if you want to, Calkins," he said. "We'll settle the matter of your salary later." Then he walked to the ticket wagon. Rony Gavin presented him with a telegram. It was from Hal Hawkins, the general agent, and addressed to Calkins. It said:

"Better join me on the advance car at Dorocton, Ohio. Up against hot opposition from Keller Brothers and the Cadigan shows. They are trying to squeeze us between them. Bring some money."

"What's this mean?" Cuddy demanded.

"Means you better jump to Dorocton, Guv'ner."

"What time can I catch a train for Dorocton?"

"At 6:30, an hour from now. You change cars at



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Washington and Pittsburgh. Get there about noon to-morrow. Here's your schedule."

"You're some little efficiency man, Rony. From now on your salary is one hundred dollars per week instead of fifty dollars. Give me three hundred dollars of that cash. Wire the Draper, Empire and American companies for figures on a new spread of canvas, same size as we now have. Keep the show running until I get back. Don't know when that will be, but I hope to join you a week from now at Coatesville. Don't forget to collect that other two thousand dollars from the Chatman Chamber of Commerce to-night. Wire me one thousand dollars care of the advance car to-morrow." And Cuddy was gone, to get his first taste of battle on the skirmish line held by the advance brigades of rival circuses.

Cuddy located the advance car of Calkins' Circus on a sidetrack not far from the railroad station at Doroc-ton. He had no difficulty in recognizing it. On a bright red background blazed the magic words: "Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair. Advance Car Number I." There were no other cars in advance of Calkins' Circus but the "Number I" sounded like many. It was good circus-advertising.

"I'm Clarence Cuddington Cotter, owner and manager of the Calkins show," he announced as soon as he identified Hawkins.

"But where is Guv'ner Calkins?" Hawkins protested.

## THE BIG SQUEEZE

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"Calkins is still on the show—as my working guest. I'm Guv'ner," was Cuddy's prompt answer. "Got any wires for me?"

"There's nothing on the car for you, Mr. Cotter." Hawkins was cautious and unconvinced.

"There'll be one here soon. It will be from Rony Gavin, treasurer of the show. It will also be for one thousand dollars," Cuddy advised him. "In the meantime, as you have not been back on the show since I took hold of it and I've seen nothing of you but telegrams, let's get into the car-manager's stateroom and have a nice friendly chat."

Cuddy had barely sketched the revolutionary changes that had taken place in the Calkins aggregation before Andrus, the car manager, knocked at the door and handed in a telegram.

"This is for you, sir?" he asked, addressing Cuddy.

"Yes. I'm the new owner," Cuddy answered, taking the telegram and Andrus' hand at the same time. Andrus muttered something noncommittal, exchanged glances with Hawkins and withdrew. Cuddy read the telegram.

"Let's go over to the bank and get that one thousand dollars," he said.

As Cuddy and Hawkins descended the car steps, Hawkins raised one eyebrow to Andrus. Then he made three motions with his right hand. "This bird is on the square," the sign language said. In a half hour Cuddy and Hawkins returned to the car. "Now

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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tell me all about this opposition, Hawkins," Cuddy commanded.

"I'll tell you all I know, Guv'ner," the general agent began. "My job is to route this show into good territory—where the money is. As general agent, I am responsible for all the men in advance of the show. I try to make my railroad contracts so that the show will get the money and keep out of the way of opposition," Hawkins continued.

"Then why this opposition from the Keller and Cadigan shows?" Cuddy asked.

"That's what puzzles me," Hawkins continued. "Us general agents try to find good territory without opposition.

"I routed this Calkins show into Ohio at the right time of year, with farmers and factory people making money and everything looking fine. The Keller show was routed through Wisconsin into the grain country of Minnesota and the Dakotas. The Cadigan show was routed through New England into Canada. Then, blooie! I woke up yesterday morning in the Palmer House, Chicago, to get a wire from Andrus that the Keller and Cadigan shows' advance cars are billing ahead of us and going to take turns playing against us day and date in several towns."

Hawkins produced his maps.

"Here's the way the big squeeze works," he continued. "Our route calls for the Calkins show being here in Doroc-ton the 11th; Newark, Ohio, the 12th; London, Ohio, the 13th; Piqua, Ohio, the 14th; Union

## *THE BIG SQUEEZE*

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City, Indiana, the 16th (Sunday comes on the 15th and we don't show on Sunday); Muncie, Indiana, on the 17th; Rushville, Indiana, on the 18th; Martinsville, Indiana, on the 19th; Vincennes, Indiana, on the 20th; and Mt. Vernon, Indiana, on the 21st. Working west, you see. Looking for the good money."

"And then what happened?" Cuddy interrogated.

"First thing I knew the Keller advance car was on our route billing the Keller show for Doroc-ton on the 11th; London, the 12th; Union City, the 16th and Rushville, the 17th, all day and date with us or ahead of our show—see? At the same time the Cadigan advance car was also on the rails, ahead of our advance car, billing the Cadigan show for Newark, the 12th; Piqua, the 13th, Muncie the 14th; and Vincennes day and date with us on the 20th. Both the Keller and Cadigan advance cars are grabbing all the good locations for their billing and leaving us no places worth anything for our paper. The Cadigan show has an extra brigade back of us covering our paper as fast as it can."

"But all that sort of thing costs Keller and Cadigan a lot of money," Cuddy objected.

"Sure it does, Mr. Cotter," Hawkins admitted, trying to be patient with his uninitiated boss. "Sure it costs them money. But you see each of the other shows—Keller's and Cadigan's—will only have opposition with us about half the time. We will have opposition with one or the other of them almost every day.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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No show in the world can stand that unless it has a national bank or two behind it."

"Supposing our show is better and bigger?" Cuddy thought he had a bright idea.

"The Calkins show isn't any better or bigger than the Keller or Cadigan shows and even if it was their constant pounding away at us will get our goat sooner or later. That's happened in the show business before."

"Why do you think Keller and Cadigan are trying to get the Calkins show?"

"Search me," Hawkins answered. "That's why I sent for you—Calkins, I mean."

"Would the fact that Goldman is away from the Calkin's show have anything to do with it?"

"But Goldman isn't away from the Calkins show."

"Yes he is. I ran him and all his grifters away. The Calkins show is a Sunday school show now—absolutely clean." Cuddy said this with pride. Hawkins looked at him in dismay.

"I get it now!" he finally exclaimed. "Goldman wired to the Keller and Cadigan shows to come on and break you—then take your show over. They certainly have worked quick. Each opposition advance car has billed two towns a day against us." He pulled disconsolately at his pipe, his eyes half closed. Then a happy thought seized him. "You've got the United States treasury back of you, Mr. Cotter."

"Not any part of it," said Cuddy.

"Good night, then. We're blowed," announced the

## *THE BIG SQUEEZE*

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general agent. "Keller and Cadigan will squeeze us to death before I have a chance to cancel our railroad contracts and change our route."

"Hawkins," said Cuddy, reclining on a bundle of circus posters while his nostrils responded to the odors of flour paste coming from the steam cooker, "I've been squeezed so often during the few thrilling days I have been in the circus business that one squeeze more or less does not scare me. Suppose we call a council of war and see what can be done about not being blowed. I'd like to talk to the boys about it. I found it helped quite a lot—talking it over with certain folks back on the show."

"The boys will be coming in from the windows, banners, boards and country routes pretty soon. As soon as they wash up—get under the showers and change their clothes—I'll have them in the dining room and you can go to it, Mr. Cotter." Thus spoke Hawkins. "But they're a hard-boiled bunch," he cautioned.

Cuddy surveyed with interest his firing-line fighters, when they assembled at the call of their general agent. They met as man to man and he found them as hard-boiled as he had been led to expect.

"Every man's a union man and there's not a booze fighter among them," Andrus announced with the pride of a successful car manager. "Every man on the car's worth his ninety dollars per month and three dollars per day meal allowance. There isn't a one who can't throw up his six hundred sheets a day. And

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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scrap! You ride this car a day or so and you'll see some real ring stuff."

They appraised him without concealment or camouflage, did Cuddy's advance brigade. The devil-may-cares grasped his hand in a deadly grip, looked into his eyes in a manner that would have chilled him when he was merely a college chap, then stood back to study the new boss with steady, unwinking gaze. They had won their spurs by fighting, and they expected Cuddy to do the same. If he had the stuff in him, he could make good with them. If he hadn't got the guts, he'd have to look for a new job of bossing, for they'd throw him off the car. Cuddy sensed the situation and made it short.

"I'm going to make it easy for you fellows to like me, because I can tell you that when I joined the Calkins show six days ago as owner, I was a simp, fresh from college. I didn't know the difference between a ring curb and an extra guy. Two days ago I started to clean my show up. Before I got through with my single or double-handed fight, I had run all the grifters away from the show. I had to learn to fight as I went along. Calkins is working for me now—on a strictly Sunday school show."

Cuddy, watching his men closely, thought he saw signs of a dawning respect. He threw off his coat to better expose his bruised knuckles. He threw off his hat to throw a higher light on his battle-scarred face. Then, warming to his work, he said:

"I fought back there with that show to make things

## *THE BIG SQUEEZE*

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easier for the people on the show, and to make things easier for you up here in the advance. Now Mr. Hawkins tells me Goldman and the other grifters I ran away from the Calkins show have framed with the Keller and the Cadigan shows to squeeze me to death, partly for revenge and partly because they think they can break me and so get a good show cheap.

"You know how hard it is for you to get up paper in any town when the reputation of the Calkins show has gone ahead of you. You know the towners think you are just advertising a bunch of thieves—and tell you so. You know that lots of times the towners run you away from good locations just because of the rotten reputation of the Calkins show.

"I'm going to change all that and do it right now. I'm going to show you fellows I know how to fight, up here as well as back with the show. First I'm going to square our show with the leading towners of this burg, then I'm going to put both the Keller and Cadigan shows in the hole all along the route. And after I've done that three things will happen. You'll have easy picking on locations wherever you go, the opposition will fade away, and I'll get into paste clothes, grab a brush and learn to throw up paper with the best of you. And I might add, at the end of two weeks, you will each get a bonus of one hundred dollars. Are you all willing to shake hands on that?"

Long Jim Flaherty, boss billposter, polled his billposting huskies without passing a word.

"We'll shake on that, Guv'ner," he said. Each



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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knight of the paste brush gripped Cuddy's hand in silence.

"And you, Mr. Hawkins?"

"Of course, Guv'ner," the general agent replied cordially.

"And you, Mr. Andrus?"

"Certainly," said the car manager.

"Then watch me do some quick work," Cuddy announced, putting on his hat and coat. "I'll be back here before the car leaves at seven o'clock to-night."

Making his way to the headquarters of the Doroc-ton Chamber of Commerce, Cuddy presented himself to the secretary.

"Have you got a Better Business Bureau here?" he inquired.

"A live one," the secretary assured him.

"Then let me tell you something," Cuddy answered, whereupon he enlightened that gentleman upon the mysteries of circus grift and how he had cleaned up the Calkins show.

"We've got a Sunday school show, absolutely without grift. Here's our contract with the Chatman Chamber of Commerce to prove it. I've plenty of other documents. The Keller and Cadigan shows are rotten with grift. Do you want your people and the people of all these other towns robbed by a gang of dirty grifters?" Cuddy demanded in conclusion, exhibiting the list of "opposition stands."

"We do not," the secretary replied with some heat. "We were stung, and a lot of other towns were stung,

## *THE BIG SQUEEZE*

---

by the Cadigan and Keller shows last season. We'll be glad to back a clean show.

"I'll telegraph to the Chamber of Commerce of every town on that list and I'll telegraph to the state authorities at Columbus and Indianapolis. You'll get your state license in both states and your local license for each town on your route in Ohio and Indiana—and the Keller and Cadigan shows won't. How does that strike you, Mr. Cotter?" concluded the secretary.

"Fine!" said Cuddy. "Now let's get those wires off while we're on the subject."

Cuddy reached the railroad station ten minutes before train time. He found his advertising crew heaving great bundles of circus paper into an open box car of an outgoing freight.

"What's the idea?" he demanded of Andrus, the car manager, who said:

"It belongs to the Cadigan show. The Cadigan flying squad is coming in on the same train we go out on, to pick up this paper. There's three days' supply here. We told the express agent the paper was for us. When the Cadigan squad drops off the train here their paper will be miles away and going fast. By the time they've found out it's gone we'll be away, too. When they get their hands on that paper, if they ever do, it'll be too late to do them any good, and we've covered all their paper in Dorocton."

The west-bound local unloaded the Cadigan squad with its paste brushes and paste buckets. As the train rolled west from Dorocton with the Calkins advance

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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car attached, Long Jim Flaherty and others of the Calkins fighting advance crew stood on the rear platform and tweaked their noses at the flying squad of Cadigan's show. The despoiled members of the Cadigan flying squad were shaking their fists at the departing Calkins advance brigade.

"That'll hold those birds for a while," said Hawkins. "Now, how about the advance cars of Keller and Cadigan ahead of us?"

"Cover all opposition paper you find," Cuddy ordered. "I'll handle the local people of importance. We'll break this squeeze game within a week. In the meantime I must learn to be a billposter."

Cuddy took his first lesson in the gentle art of billposting on the main street of Piqua, Ohio. In blue overalls and paste-besprinkled shirt and hat he had learned to throw up an eight-sheet unaided. Now he was wrestling at the top of a swaying ladder, in a high wind, with a stubborn circus-streamer. This piece of three-colored type paper was twenty-eight inches high and twenty-eight feet long. It was tightly rolled and balanced on a brush, while Cuddy held hard to the lower end of a twenty-foot brush handle. Cuddy had been directed by Andrus, on the sidewalk below, to unroll the streamer along the paste-bedaubed board, smoothing and pasting it down as he went. Andrus was initiating his boss.

The streamer, when fully unfolded read: "Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of

## THE BIG SQUEEZE

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Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair. In All the World No Show Like This." It was designed to be the headline for the pictorial display of the blood-sweating behemoth, bicuspid bucephalus, and other attractions in the mammoth menagerie aforesaid.

Cuddy had unrolled the poster to the word "Circus," when an earthquake shook him from his perch. He slid and fell down the swaying ladder. Halfway in his descent his paste bucket upset—its contents deluged his head and shoulders. Thus discomfited, Cuddy landed amid the mingled arms, legs, feet, hands, heads and bodies of Andrus and his battling billposters who were valiantly entangled with other gentlemen in rough billposting attire. These other gentlemen Cuddy knew not, but he struck at one of them on general principles. Cuddy promptly slapped against the billboard. The unknown antagonist had struck back.

"Come on, Guv'ner," Andrus shouted. "The Keller and Cadigan advance crews are here to clean us up. If we don't get away with this gang, we'll close the season right now!"

As Cuddy dashed into the fray, he saw the rest of his advertising crew racing for the center of the storm with other huskies—from the Keller and Cadigan cars. Paste brushes, paste buckets, rolls of gaudy circus bills, billposters, car managers, press agents and Cuddy were furiously mixed in a milling mass whence issued caustic criticisms of a ghastly personal nature.

Cuddy found that the men of the advertising brigades were tougher than the circus "bad men." Be-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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fore the fight had progressed to its second round, the sole owner and manager of Calkins' Classical Circus was a badly winded human billboard. Like a silkworm he had spun his own cocoon of four-colored circus-posters—lithographic illustrations of the glories of the circus to come. It was the acme of absurdity that the particular circus bill in which Cuddy thus happened to inwrap himself depicted the beauty, grace and daring of Miss Marion Fortescue!

By the time he had disentangled himself, Cuddy's men were chasing the defeated Keller and Cadigan crews down the main street of Piqua with such speed that the police were hopelessly outdistanced. So Cuddy, being the only available participant, was loaded into the patrol wagon and taken to the police station. There Hawkins, who had not participated in the struggle, found his chief.

"File this message to the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Dorocton, then get some one from the local Chamber of Commerce, or whatever they call it here, to let me talk to him," commanded Cuddy, as he labored to remove the paper, paste, and other signs of his fistic endeavors.

"Right away, Guv'ner," Hawkins answered. "There are two newspaper men outside. Want to see them?"

"Send them in," said Cuddy, and while he awaited the result of his wire to Dorocton, Cuddy, skillfully suppressing his own name, graphically described the reason for the battle of the billposting brigades, expanding upon the virtues of the griftless Calkins cir-

## *THE BIG SQUEEZE*

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cus and upon the vices of the grifting Keller and Cadigan shows. Before Cuddy had concluded his narrative, before he had been haled into court to answer to the charge of disorderly conduct, Hawkins was back with an answer from Dorocton.

"Read that to the gentlemen of the press, the judge—and the local vigilance committee, if they have any thing of that sort here," said Cuddy loudly and with lordly dignity.

"Dorocton salutes you and your noble cause [the telegram said]. Our Better Business Bureau greets you. We have barred Cadigan's circus from our city. We have been advised that other cities on your route have barred both the Keller and Cadigan shows. We are for clean business, which you represent. Calkins' Circus will get a royal reception at Dorocton."

It was signed by the secretary of the Better Business Bureau of the Dorocton Chamber of Commerce.

"That will hold them for a while," said Cuddy after the reading had been completed. In an aside to Hawkins he added: "I certainly did sell that Dorocton Chamber of Commerce on the idea of a Sunday school show."

The advance car of Calkins' Classical Circus rolled westward from Piqua, Ohio, to Union City, Indiana. The knights of the paste and brush were washing their wounds. Clarence Cuddington Cotter, sole owner and manager of Calkins' Circus, was doing likewise. As

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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he attended to his injuries, he sang softly a song of tournament and love. It was the song he sang in the presence of Fatty Frazier the first time he beheld Marion Fortescue in her white riding habit with her team of tandem whites. It had to do with the days of old when knights were bold and young gallants rescued ladies fair from evil influence.

This time it was Hawkins, the general agent, who interrupted Cuddy's singing.

"You'll stay with us and ride the bill car for a while Guv'ner Cotter?"

"Nope, can't do it. Sorry, Hawkins. But I must double back to the show from Union City to-night." Cuddy softly renewed his song.

"What's the idea, Guv'ner? Don't you like us on the advance?"

"Like you! I like every laddie-buck on the brigade," said Cuddy with honest enthusiasm. "But you tell me the opposition has been broken."

"That's right, Guv'ner. I saw the orders in the station agent's office. There were wires from both shows—Keller's and Cadigan's. They've both run away from us. They've canceled all opposition stands. Keller's show is making long jumps into the Dakota grain country. Cadigan's show is heading for the maritime provinces of Canada, where they were headed for before they started this opposition fight. I never saw two shows licked so suddenly."

"Then I haven't any excuse for staying with you," said Cuddy. "I must get back on the show." He

## THE BIG SQUEEZE

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consulted a sheaf of telegrams. One was from Rony Gavin, "Calkins has blown the show. Look out for a frame-up," it said.

That was another wire. It was from Cuddy's Uncle Ned. It said:

"Your wire from Dawsville not satisfactory."

Cuddy led Hawkins into Andrus' stateroom and shut all others out.

"Say, Hawkins. Who is Marion Fortescue?"

"You ought to know. She's working for you, Guv'ner."

"I know who she is on the show. She's the best performer and one of the finest, cleverest girls I ever knew." Cuddy hesitated. "But who are her people? Where did she come from?" Cuddy was red from much talking.

"Marion Fortescue belongs to the best people in the profession," said Hawkins, the walking Who's Who on Circusdom. "On her father's side she goes back to the Rawtons. On her mother's side she goes back to the Tickneys. There were great riders in both families, you know."

"And riders?"

"Are the aristocrats of the circus business," Hawkins explained. "And speaking of aristocrats, she isn't very proud of it, but Marion Fortescue is also related, through her mother, to the Conderbilts of New York."

"Thanks," said Cuddy, patting his tie into shape.



"Want to know about any one else on the show, Guv'ner?"

"No, thanks," said Cuddy. "Hello. This Union City? Here's where I catch the east-bound for Coatesville and the show. Good-by, everybody. Gavin will wire you, Mr. Andrus, the bonus money next week. See that the boys get it. I've had a peach of a time."

The paste-brush gang grinned a fond farewell to their battling circus boss.

"You certainly can fight," said Andrus. "But why did you cover up your name in those Piqua interviews, Guv'ner?"

"I'm advertising the Calkins show, not me," said Cuddy. "And then I have my reasons for being modest. Andrus, you know now how to use all this griftless circus stuff with the commercial clubs."

The train stopped at the Union City station. Cuddy, bag in hand, swung down to the station platform. Andrus was reminded of something.

"Who was that thin, black-mustached bird the coppers pinched in Piqua just before we pulled out of there, Guv'ner Cotter?"

"Oh, that was Sol Goldman. He had the grift on the Calkins show, you remember, before I ran him off. Goldman framed this Keller and Cadigan opposition against us and got both those Keller and Cadigan advance cars back to Piqua to clean us up. I had him pinched and put away. He'll be lucky if he gets out this season. So long, Andrus," and Cuddy started through the station to catch the east-bound train.

## THE BIG SQUEEZE

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"Five minutes to spare," he muttered, looking up at the station clock. He stepped up to the telegraph desk and sent this message to his Uncle Ned in New York:

"Marion Fortescue is a Calkins circus performer related to the Conderbilts of New York."

"Guess that will give him something to think about," Cuddy mumbled as he plumped into his Pullman seat and onto the recumbent form of Slats Murphy, his baby-faced, flat-chested college rival.

"Where on earth you been?" shouted Slats, sitting up, wide-eyed. "Frog-eyed," thought Cuddy, for Murphy's eyes bulged more than usual.

Cuddy regarded him coldly, silently.

"You don't seem crazy to see your old college chum," Slats complained. "And you hardly bade me good-by that day in New York!"

"Are you crazy to see me?" Cuddy inquired.

"Not as crazy as Marjorie Trent is. I've been searching for you for nights and days, on her orders. You've been rotten with Marjorie," he added. "And I am her gallant knight!"

"That's my business," said Cuddy. "About Marjorie and all that."

"Mine, too," answered Slats, puffing out his apple cheeks.

"How's that?" Cuddy resisted a temptation to wring Slats' neck.

"I mean to marry her." Slats tried to look impressive.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Where do I come in?" Cuddy's hand crept toward Slats' collar.

"If you don't turn up—there I am."

"I'll be there. Don't fool yourself," said Cuddy.

"I think a lot more of her than you do or I wouldn't be stalking you!" exclaimed Slats.

"Slats, speaking as one college man to another, you're a nut."

"And you're a crazy fool."

"Maybe so. But if you tell a soul you've seen me I'll break every bone in your body. And don't you dare follow me," declared Cuddy, backing out of the Pullman.

Slats stared after him. "Good heavens, how he's changed!" he whispered. "What am I going to tell Marjorie?"

Cuddy, in the depths of the day coach, consulted an official-looking document, taken from Sol Goldman at Piqua. For the first time he noticed across the top in Uncle Ned's fine hand:

"To have legal value this document should be recorded at some county seat in each state the circus visits. N.C."

He dropped off the train at Urbana, called at the county recorder's office and said:

"Please record this. It's a bill of sale for Calkins' Circus. I'm Cotter."

The clerk looked at it casually, then closely. "A

## *THE BIG SQUEEZE*

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bill of sale for Calkins' circus was recorded here yesterday," he replied.

"By whom?" Cuddy demanded.

The clerk consulted his records. "By Solomon Goldman," he answered, "in his favor."



## XII

### CUDDY SEES MARJORIE

C UDDY was back in his old college town. A few days with a circus had made a difference in him. He was no longer the debonair, nonchalant Cuddy, the spritely senior of Columbus College. He no longer wore his clothes like the fashionably tailored man upon whom undergrads had gazed with envy. His once slick hair, whose fascinating waves had reflected the light of the campus or the ball room, was still wavy. Toward the top of his head, where once reposed a collegian's cap, it still defiantly curled. But its artificial luster was gone—washed out by the rains of a circus lot.

His shoes were muddy, his hands rough, his face burned and unshaven. Even his gait had changed. He no longer strolled at ease with himself and the world. He strode determinedly as though each time he put his foot down he meant to stay there until he should be allowed to advance. He seemed to be possessed of a purpose. He gave the impression of one who knew what he was about and intended doing it. But with all his expressed determination, Cuddy was slinking. He was undeniably under cover.

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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Turning from one side street into another and carefully avoiding the electric arcs and automobile lights, he walked rapidly through the outer edge of the town, until he approached the college campus. Then he sat down in the shadow of a tree to rest. Lighting a cigarette behind a bit of bush, he took stock of himself.

"I certainly am an ass—a fool," was his conclusion. "I take an unexpected plunge into the circus business and put college behind me forever. Then I let a few words from that ass, Slats Murphy, run me away from a show I should stay with and fight for, if I'm ever going to get anywhere. And for what? For the sake of seeing Marjorie whom I do not dare speak to. And yet—I just have to see her and I must find out what there is between Marjorie and Slats. Wonder what I can find out at the Zeta house?"

Cuddy climbed a stile far to the east of the Zeta house, stepped gingerly along a wooded lane, crossed a weedy street and, avoiding shafts of light from upper study windows, flopped into the grass at the corner of the porch. On such an hour and on such a balmy evening some of his brothers would be smoking the pipe of peace. Two of them were. Orton Burch, his feet hanging over the railing, strummed on a banjo and talked with Bushy Thorn—about Cuddy.

"Lot more bucking in this house than there was a month ago," Burch remarked.

"That's because Cuddy's gone," Thorn rejoined.

"Cuddy was the soul of good-heartedness, the life of the party," Burch replied. "But he kept too many

## CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS

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of us on the rocks of class-room ignorance and quite a few of us, too, near our local jail."

"Wonder what the Paint and Patches Club will do about filling his place in the David Garrick cast," mooned Thorn.

"That's already been filled. Slat's Murphy is to play the part assigned to Cuddy," Burch asserted.

"Slat's Murphy!" Thorn exclaimed. "Why, Slat's can't act for sour apples. And as for playing opposite Marjorie Trent, that's impossible!"

"Impossible or not, Slat's has been elected to Paint and Patches. And the *Columbus College Daily* says he's to take the part Cuddy was to play. Saw it in to-day's edition," Burch insisted. "Wonder how much Marjorie Trent had to do with that."

"If you belonged to Slat's Murphy's fraternity and were over at his chapter house to-night you might be able to find out," Thorn replied.

"What do you mean?" Burch demanded.

"The Rho Epsilons are having their formal party at their house to-night. Slat's is a Rho Epsilon, you know. And I heard at Old Dormitory yesterday that Slat's is taking Marjorie. If you'll listen you can hear the dulcet strains of Kerry Kuelgen's Jazzers now."

Cuddy could hear them well. There's more than one reward for having one's ear to the ground. He had been wondering between the stabs administered by his Zeta friends where the Jazzers were jazzing and why. His interest promptly transferred itself from the Zeta to the Rho Epsilon house. As he backed

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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away, crab fashion, in the darkness, he heard his erst-while mates softly singing one of his old-time favorites:

“When the shades of night have gathered round  
String your guitar and let us sound  
The praises of Columbus fine  
And of our Zeta, yours and mine.

“When pipes are glowing in old porch chairs  
Tune up and plunk your chapter airs.  
For the absent ones for whom we pine  
And for our Zeta, yours and mine.”

Cuddy gained the shelter of the lot-line hedge. His heart was heavier than his feet.

“Not a living thing around this house cares whether I’m alive or dead,” he muttered bitterly. “Not a living thing.”

Something came creeping out of the dark to meet him. Something that clung as close to the ground as he did. Something that made no sound, that gave no warning. His first knowledge of this new presence was the chill of a palpitating muzzle thrust into his half-open fist, the warmth of a wriggling body snuggling up to his. The ecstatic in-breathing and exhaling of a delirious dog. It was Sniggs, chapter house mascot, the brown and white unpedigreed, English bull terrier which Cuddy loved as he loved his life.

Cuddy embraced him.

“How did you get out, old-timer?” he whispered.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Sneaked up on me just like the true terrier, didn't you? I'd have caught that white of your breast if you hadn't come up from behind. You old rascal!"

Sniggs wriggled closer into Cuddy's embrace, vainly endeavoring to make two bodies occupy the same space at the same time. He nosed Cuddy from head to feet. He squirmed and twisted and rolled around in Cuddy's arms in an abandon of happiness. He fondled Cuddy's face with a hot and fervid tongue.

"You haven't thrown me down. You haven't crossed me off your list. You haven't forgotten the gorgeous times we all had together here, have you, Sniggs?"

The dog licked more frantically and wriggled as if he would disjoint his muscular body. He writhed and rolled, then clung closer to Cuddy and whispered dear dog nothings in Cuddy's quickened ear. Cuddy folded him to his heart.

"I've one friend who's always a friend," he muttered. "Glad you can't see the tears in my eyes, old-timer. 'Fraid you'd lose your respect for me for being so soft. But God! you feel good to me. Guess you don't suspect where I've been or what I'm going through, Sniggs. Got a big job on my hands now, old pal. Trying to make up for a lot of chances I've thrown away. Funny game I'm playing, too. Even you wouldn't understand it if I tried to tell you about it. You'd play it out, though, just as I'm going to. You're a bull terrier. That's what I'm going to be."

Sniggs wriggled out of Cuddy's arms, frolicked away, cut curlicues with his feet, caught his stubby

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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tail in his jaws, spun madly about like a canine pin-wheel, flattened himself on the ground a yard from Cuddy, growled, made off a few feet, came back and whined enticingly.

"Can't do it to-night, Sniggs," Cuddy whispered. "No play for us now. That's got to wait until some other time. No play for me at all just now. No play except to play the big game that I don't know much about. But you did me a royal kindness when you came out here to hunt me up to-night. I'll not forget it. And don't you forget it, either. Small chance that you will, though. You never forget anything, especially a friend."

Sniggs cuddled closely to Cuddy (champion cuddler of Columbus college). Cuddy folded him in a last embrace.

"Enough of this," he finally said. "You know I love you, Sniggs, and I know you love me. Some time when the war I'm serving in is over and I'm crowned with victory of whatever the gods have in store for me, I'm coming back to get you. Until then, old-timer, it's only your duty and mine. If I was the kind of fellow most of my old friends around here seem to think I am, I'd bundle you up and take you with me. But I can't do that honorably. Not now. You belong to the other fellows as much as you do to me. So I'm going my way and you're going yours."

Sniggs sniffed softly in Cuddy's neck. Sniggs' paws were on Cuddy's shoulders. Cuddy was kneeling on

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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the grass, his arms around the dog's pulsing body. Gently Cuddy disengaged himself from his friend's embrace. Gently he placed Sniggs' paws upon the ground, and whispered in Sniggs' cocked ear: "You must go back now." Sniggs protested. "Yes, you must," Cuddy insisted. "A duty's a duty with dog and man. Here we part, old-timer, but not forever. Put that little sentiment in your memory book. You go your way, back to the chapter house. I go my way, back to my circus. You don't know what a circus is, but you may some day. Until that time, or until I see you again, you be a good doggie, Sniggs. Will you?"

Sniggs wriggled willing assent.

"All right, then, back you go. Good-night and good-by, my boy." For a moment Cuddy laid his cheek to the cheek of his canine pal. Then he said, "Now what must be, must be. Go to the house, Sniggs."

Obediently Sniggs disappeared in the deeper shadow of the chapter house. Cuddy arose, lighted a cigarette and set off for the formal spring party of the Rho-Epsilons.

Cuddy remembered that just outside the window of the Rho Epsilon ballroom stood a giant pine tree.

He worked his way to the rear of the house, climbed the fence, kept within the shadow of the giant pine as he crept across the lawn, swiftly shinned up the rosiny trunk and breathlessly straddled the lower limbs of his risky lookout.

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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He scrambled to a higher limb, so that no telltale feet might reveal his hiding place.

The minutes passed and there was no hue and cry. Cuddy was safe for the time being. Groups of girls and boys remained chatting on the Rho Epsilon porch. Within the enemy house Kerry Kuelgen's Jazzers continued to jazz. Fate was, at least temporarily, kind to him. Clinging to his insecure perch, Cuddy parted the green branches and peered through the open window into the ballroom.

There was Sue Harris in her peacock blue charmeuse, dancing with Perry Givens, fluffy-haired Mazie Frost one-stepping with Carl Mitchell, willowy Corinne Plaintain floating over the floor with John Richards. There were a dozen other girls to whom he had made college love before Marjorie came into his life and he had discarded his squab affairs for his one real passion. But he could not see Marjorie, or Slat. He leaned further toward the window, searching the room for the thing he didn't want to see.

Then Marjorie floated toward him, tall, dark, sinuous, serene, her rounded arms in bewitching color contrast to her flame-colored georgette. She carried a black ostrich fan—the one Cuddy had given her. She wore an onyx and platinum chain and earrings that dropped to the soft curve in her neck.

She was dancing with the detestable, flat-chested, gopher-cheeked, slab-sided Slat. Cuddy bit deeply into his under lip. It seemed to him that Marjorie and Slat looked unreasonably happy. Slat said some-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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thing to Marjorie. She smiled at him and tapped him with her fan. Marjorie knew she had pretty teeth and an unequaled olive complexion. Cuddy wondered whether Marjorie might have sensed his presence and was rubbing it in. She was capable of it, he thought. And she was much to be desired. Cuddy rubbed one sticky hand over a furrowed forehead. What could he do about it?

The Kerry Kuelgen Jazzers ceased to jazz. The dancers flocked to the porch or to various cozy corners. Cuddy almost fell out of his tree when Marjorie and Slats seated themselves in the open window. Slats lighted a cigarette. Marjorie gently fanned herself. She was torturingly close to Slats. She was tantalizingly close to Cuddy. He could almost reach out and touch her.

"Nifty party, eh, Marjorie?" said Slats.

"Adorable!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Say that again, just that way, and look straight at me," prompted Slats.

"Adorable, and so are your flowers," Marjorie said. She smiled again.

Cuddy dug one clinging hand into the pine-tree bark. It came away smeared with rosin. "If I could only rub that into Murphy's face," he mumbled.

"Marjorie, " said Slats, " I hate to indulge in axioms, "but you look particularly beautiful to-night."

"That's because I'm so happy," she responded.

Cuddy sank his teeth deeper into his lower lip. He had to do something to keep from crying out loud.

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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"Then you don't miss Cuddy?" Slats inquired. Cuddy detected a sneer in Murphy's smile. He wondered whether he should not launch himself from his pine-tree bough and with one well aimed leap land upon Slats and break that beast's red neck. Marjorie's reply banished this thought.

"I miss no one who has no respect for himself or his friends," she said.

"You mean—?"

"That Cuddy forfeited his right to my regard when he left us all as he did. All the campus knows our engagement was announced the day before he disappeared, and I've had just one unexplanatory letter from him. One cannot keep such things from college friends. I'm not accustomed to total lack of consideration." She pouted divinely. Cuddy had brought her out of the pouts before. If he could only talk to her now.

Slats intervened with a leading question.

"If you had heard nothing more from him and held your present opinion of him, why did you send me out on that wild-goose chase after him? Talk about trying to find a needle in a haystack!"

Marjorie hesitated.

"I wanted to give him one more chance before I cut him out of my life. I wanted to be fair. That was sporting, wasn't it? I thought if you found him and appealed to his sense of sportsmanship—I used to think he had such a sense—he might do something to clear up the situation for both of us."

Slats toyed with his cigarette thoughtfully.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Marjorie," he said, "supposing—I—did—find—Cuddy?"

Marjorie was on her feet instantly.

"Oh, what do you mean?" she demanded eagerly.

Cuddy watched Slats with burning eyes. Was the beast going to break his promise! Would he dare! Evidently Slats was working himself up to some momentous decision.

"Well—Marjorie. I—think — I — should — tell — you—"

Sallie Rogers rushed up to the couple. Sallie was one of the college irrepressibles. She was the official enthusiast of the institution. She was Columbus' greatest long-distance gurgler. Marjorie and Slats frowned upon her, but Sallie didn't know it.

"Oh, Marjorie!" she gurgled. "You've just got to come over to the other side of the ballroom this very minute! That new girl—the one that's to enter next year from Richland Villa—is here, and you know how we're rushing her and how the Deltas are after her! We need every star member we have to-night to work on her."

"Sallie, you are interrupting us," said Marjorie severely. "I can't come now. By and by."

"Oh, Marjorie! you must," Sallie continued. "The girls have sent me after you especially. You're the stunningest, most impressive member we have. We've got to have your assistance this very minute."

Marjorie tapped her foot impatiently. Slats puffed angrily. Sallie kept on gurgling.

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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"Marjorie, I won't move from this spot until you come along! You know what a catch this Richland Villa girl will be. I forget her name, but her people are in all the best circles and she has heaps of money, and two cousins who'll enter two years from now. If the Deltas get her, it'll be the hardest blow our sorority has had in years and years. You ought to hear who she knows in New York!"

Marjorie rose resignedly.

"If I had your endurance, Sallie," she remarked. Then to Slats: "Don't you dare move from this window until I get back. I'll not be gone a moment." Towed by Sallie Rogers, Marjorie Trent moved majestically across the ballroom floor.

Something dropped at Slats Murphy's feet. He picked it up. It was a bit of white paper folded around a coin. Slats unfolded the paper. Scrawled in pencil on the torn bit of paper were the words:

"Do you want to be beaten to death?"

Slats turned pale. His frog eyes hung upon his apple cheeks.

From out of the dark, in a sepulchral voice, came the command:

"If the answer is 'no' shake your head. If the answer is 'yes' nod it. If you answer 'yes' I'll beat you to death."

Slats slowly but positively shook his heavily shocked head.

Marjorie returned to her window seat. "Now what were you about to tell me?" she asked Slats, leaning



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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toward him earnestly. "You said something about suppose you did find Cuddy."

Slats fingered his lightless cigarette, looked sadly at Marjorie, glanced hastily into the outer darkness, and replied:

"What's the use of talking about something that never happened? Come on, there's the next dance."

Amid the clamor of the Kuelgen Jazzers Marjorie and Slats mingled with the dancers at the Rho Epsilon fraternity formal. Cuddy slid down the pine-tree trunk, acquiring more rosin on the way, and made his stealthy and undetected escape into the dismal night.

"Looks as if I were playing a pretty lone hand," he said to himself as he eluded a pair of strolling lovers and started on his suburban circuit for the garage where reposed his good red roadster.

"If there's one old friend in this town that I know I can depend upon it's Mike, the motor magician," he decided. "He's kept many a secret for me in the old days. He can keep one important one now—the secret of my presence. Wonder where I can find a discreetly secluded pay station."

He slid into a wee corner-grocery, disappeared in a telephone booth and called up the Constant Service Garage. A familiar voice answered.

"Mike," said Cuddy, "you'll know who this is without my telling you, so there's no use in swearing you to secrecy before I reveal my identity. But mum's the word. Do you get me?"

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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"Oi get ye," was Mike's reply. "Phwat's doin'?"

"No one but you knows I'm in town and no one but you is going to know if you keep your trap closed. How about it?"

"Right wid ye," was Mike's prompt reply. "Phwat's ye wantin'?"

"I want you to bring my red roadster out to the corner of Mercie and Grampus streets and wait for me under the big maple there, in the dark," was Cuddy's order.

"Sorrah th' day, me friend," wailed Mike, "but th' night man got on a dhrunk night 'for lasht, left th' door unlocked, an' whin he got back t' th' garage there was three cars missin'. Wan of thim was yours."

"Mike, stop your kidding," Cuddy demanded.

"Oh, sor, would that it was kiddin' Oi am, but it is no kid. High an' low we are thrying t' find th' cars with all th' insurance sharps an' th' autymobile clubs alookin', but nary a one do we find so far. Oi'm thinkin' they are what ye call greatly convarted by this toime an' we'll see no more o' thim."

Cuddy was conscious of a bit of dew upon his brow. He hadn't thought of losing his red roadster. It had meant a certain freedom of movement. It also meant, in a most desperate pinch, some life-saving cash. He gasped a moment then said:

"All right, Mike. That's that. Sorry you weren't kidding me, that's all."

"An' phwat else can Oi do for ye, sor?" from Mike.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Looks like you'd done a lot already," from Cuddy. "There's one thing you'll have to do, however. Get some car out of the garage and meet me where I told you a minute ago. I'm certainly going from here."

"Oi'll be there at wance," said Mike as he hung up.

"Make it a closed car," were Cuddy's last words. He slid out of the store and into the dark side of the back street. A few minutes later he was in the car with Mike. They clasped hands fraternally.

"In trouble, Mishter Cuddy?" he asked.

"Well, more or less," Cuddy admitted.

"Bootlegging's mighty risky," suggested Mike.

"It's not as bad as that—quite," Cuddy admitted. "But I got to get to Pentonville by motor car and no one must know I've been here. Will you still play the game, Mike?" he continued.

"Ye know it," said Mike. "But th' Missus an' th' kids would give their eyes to know that th' Mishter Cuddy who helped us through our sick spell had been among thim thish night."

"I'll see them some other time," Cuddy answered. "Hit her up, Mike."

They rolled out of town, past the railroad crossing where only six weeks before Cuddy and his student pals had stolen one monkey cage and crossed their futile fists with a fighting circus gang. Cuddy smiled grimly when he recalled that night's happy college-prank—and then he almost plunged his head through the glass side of the sedan. For as the car dashed under a swinging arc light he got a flash of pictorial

## *CUDDY SEES MARJORIE*

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circus bills, a streamer reading "Calkins' Circus" and a circus date sheet shouting:

CALKINS' CIRCUS  
WILL EXHIBIT HERE!  
POSITIVELY ONE DAY ONLY!  
TWO PERFORMANCES  
AFTERNOON AND NIGHT

Cuddy's circus was coming to the seat of Columbus College!

"Why didn't I warn Hawkins to stay out of this town," moaned Cuddy. "Positively one day only is just one day too much for me. I must catch Hawkins by wire to tell him to switch his route. If I was out of luck before, I wonder what I'll be two weeks from to-day when I reach here with the show. I've tried so hard to keep under cover until I could get going!"

He buried his face in his hands.

"And I got my fraternity fellows to promise they'd clean up the very next circus gang that came to Columbus College," he moaned. "What won't they do to Calkins' Circus?"

The car halted at Pentonville. Cuddy knew that in an hour he could catch a night train bound circusward. He shook hands with Mike.

"You're the good pal, Mike," he said. "As soon as I can, I'll write you and then you can tell the Missus and the kids that you saw me, but until then you'll tell no one. Got your word for it?"



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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“In truth, ye have,” said Mike. They shook hands again. “An’ Oi’m hopin’ Oi’ll be seein’ you soon.”

“Maybe sooner than you think,” faltered Cuddy.

Mike and his car sped toward Columbus College.

Cuddy sat down in lonesome silence on the edge of the deserted station platform.

## XIII

### MANSON AND MARION

“**P**OSSESSION of a circus as of other property is nine points of the law. As long as you stay on this show and assert your claim to proprietorship, backed up by exhibition of your original bill of sale, just so long are your chances good that you can put over your claim and maintain possession. But there is, of course, always the other chance that Sol Goldman will call upon the courts to oust you in his favor. If that happens—you’ll be out of luck. A long legal fight costs money.”

Thus spoke Rony Gavin, assistant manager of Calkins’ Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair. Rony was trying to iron out the lines in Cuddy’s forehead. Cuddy had come back to his circus after his hurried trip to his advertising brigade, during which he had demonstrated genius for generalship in the face of fierce opposition.

Cuddy had said nothing to Rony or any one else connected with the circus about his nighttime pilgrimage to Columbus College. That was his secret, to be shared with no one. But the other secret, that Goldman had recorded a bogus bill of sale in order to get

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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fraudulent possession of Calkins' Circus, Cuddy was willing to share with Rony. For Rony was Cuddy's right-hand man with much circus experience to guide him.

"I suppose you and I, Rony, will have to fight this thing out alone," Cuddy said.

"Yep. Don't do to let any one else on the show know that Goldman has put one over on you again," Rony agreed. "We just got to sit tight and watch the cards as they fall on the table, knowing that at least one trick is held by Goldman or Calkins."

"Why Calkins?"

"Of course Calkins is back of Goldman in this latest move. And I'm not knocking but—Manson was Calkins' right bower."

"I didn't give Calkins credit for so much resource.

"He's a natural-born crook with a lot of specialized training. And he had some good understudies."

"You think we can beat him out eventually?"

"Absolutely, if you stay with the show and don't lose your nerve. And don't let Manson get your goat—about Marion."

"I'm on," Cuddy declared. Then his brow clouded again. "Has Hawkins sent us the route for the next two weeks?" he asked.

"Just got it this morning," Rony answered, fishing a bundle of papers out of his pocket. "Hawkins was slowed up some in making his railroad contracts by that hot opposition fight with the Keller and Cadigan shows. Here's the route."

Cuddy glanced at it hastily. His eyes had not deceived him in his night's ride out of Columbus College. Calkins' Circus—Cuddy Cotter, now sole owner and proprietor—was to play in his college town thirteen days hence. Cuddy pointed an unsteady finger at the dangerous day.

"That date, there," he faltered, "I happen to know, is a college town. Are college towns any good for circuses?"

"Some of them are, if college is in session. That town you refer to there is where Columbus College is located. They have four thousand students in that school. They'll be a little hard up just now 'cause the school year is about over, but students nearly always fall for a circus. Then the town's got about twelve thousand regular population, there's six factories there with nine hundred people on their pay rolls. Most factory hands are good showgoers. The place is surrounded by good farming country. Land is worth about three hundred dollars an acre. Corn is all in. Oats coming on fine. Bank deposits better than last season. Railroad business, in and out, forty per cent ahead of last season. Yes," concluded Rony judicially, "I'd say that that Columbus College stand would be a pretty good one for Calkins' show."

"Rony," exclaimed Cuddy in admiration, "where on earth did you get all that information?"

"What information?" Rony demanded.

"Why, that you just gave me about Columbus College and the town and all that!"



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Oh, that's just routine stuff. Every showman who has anything to do about routing a show—the show, you know, should be routed from the ticket wagon and not from the general agent's head—knows all about such things from habit. Any boob—I beg your pardon, Guv'ner Cotter—I don't mean it in disrespect, but there is an old saying in the circus business that any boob can run a show; it's the wise one who knows where to put it—where to find the money."

"Never thought of that," said Cuddy.

"What I mean is," continued Rony, "that a circus owner can hire good men to run his show. You get good department bosses who respect you and who know you know what is going on, and the show will run itself. And there's always a good man on the show ready to step in and take the place of a boss who thinks the show can't get along without him. But the important trick of the whole circus business is to know where to put your show on the map every day for a hundred and fifty to two hundred days in the year—and change your location every day. Get me?"

"But how do you know where to put it?" Cuddy queried.

"There's lots of ways of finding out," Rony assured him. "Every experienced and successful showman knows the show history of almost every town of from five thousand, up. Lots of towns are known to be good towns in certain months and bad in others. Lots of other towns are known to be poor show towns—folks aren't circus crazy, you know. Lots of other towns are

closed towns. Won't let any shows in because other shows have grifted them so hard. That's why the clean shows are gradually running the crooked shows out of the business."

"You think I'm right in trying to clean up this Calkins show, now that I own it?"

"You certainly are," Rony assured him. "The biggest circuses in the world, the best money-makers, made it all on the square. They got their reputation and their size by not gyping the public out of a cent. But they couldn't have gotten anywhere in the show business without knowing where to find a market for their wares. You see a showman has to sell his product—amusement—where and when people want to buy it."

"I think I'm beginning to see," said Cuddy.

"Well, once you know all about the show history of each of the towns in the country—and you learn most of that from experience or hearsay—then you have to know whether there's enough sidetrack in each town to spot your show train while you're there and whether the railroad will haul you into that town at all or not. Then you must know whether there's a lot big enough to get your show up on, and whether you can get to that lot without too much trouble, and whether it is apt to be too soft in wet weather, and all that sort of thing. Some managers and some general agents keep a card index of all such information. Another important thing to know is when a town was last showed—whether it's a fresh town or one that's

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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been showed to death. Then of course you have to stay away from fairs and try to play towns on certain celebration days. Bunker Hill Day is a good day in Boston. Dominion Day is a good day in lots of Canadian towns. In other Canadian towns it isn't worth a cent. It's rotten."

"My, you have to know a lot, don't you?"

"About territory," continued Rony. "Have to know a lot about territory in selling millinery or hoisting engines. It's all part of the selling game. You take a good piece of merchandise of any kind, advertise it strong enough to create demand, then try to unload your merchandise where the folks are most apt to buy—and when they are feeling good financially. We get a lot of our routing dope from banking, commercial and railroad reports."

"Think I'll ever learn all that, Rony?"

"Sure, Mr. Cotter. Soon as you forget some of your college stuff. But keep your eye on your equestrian director—Montrose Manson."

"But speaking of college," Cuddy returned to the subject uppermost in his mind. "You think that Columbus College stand will be all right?"

"Why not?" Rony eyed him narrowly.

"When I was in my college once the fellows roughed up a circus one night," Cuddy answered with attempted indifference.

"Students aren't hard to handle if you just let them have their head a little," Rony announced. "I believe there was a sort of a clem with a circus at Columbus

College a little while ago. Some trouble down at the loading runs. But it didn't amount to much."

"No chance for us to get Hawkins to cancel the Columbus College stand and play some other stand in its place?"

"I wouldn't try that if I were you. Hawkins has had enough trouble with routing of late. Let him alone. We'll get through that college town all right."

"Somehow I have a hunch there'll be trouble there," said Cuddy.

"You mustn't get superstitious just because you're a showman," Rony admonished him.

"Maybe so," said Cuddy. But he failed to brighten. He became gloomier as the days went by. Marion Fortescue reproached him for this the day before the dreaded college stand was reached.

"Please pardon me, Mr. Cotter," she said as they stood at the dressing-room entrance during the afternoon performance, "but our dressing room had a session about you after parade this morning, and we can't help wondering what's worrying you."

"There's nothing worrying me," Cuddy answered briskly. "Business is good, show's running smooth, I'm getting good coöperation from every one on the show. Why should I worry?"

"That's what we all agreed this morning," Marion continued. "But you see, we've all grown to like you a lot, Mr. Cotter. You're making this show a nice, clean, family show—the kind of a show we like to work for. If we didn't feel that way about the show



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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and about you, I wouldn't be able to speak to you as I am. But we know there's something on your mind—we can't guess what bothers you, because you have proved that you have the making of a showman—and we want you to know that we stand ready to help you any time you want help. That's all."

"There's absolutely nothing on my mind but my hair," Cuddy assured her.

Marion shook her head.

"Even you can't fool a woman," she replied as she tripped into the arena for her wire act.

"Wise little person," thought Cuddy. "Does she get her wisdom from walking the wire, flying on the trapeze, riding a high-school horse, doing a butterfly act or bossing the big elephants? I give it up. She certainly has my number."

He drifted back into the pad room where the ring stock stood in readiness for its various bits on the circus program. Montrose Manson, equestrian director, was superintending the wrapping of a horse's lame leg. Manson, Cuddy felt, was his only enemy on the show.

"Manson, got a little time to spare?" Cuddy asked.

Manson listened to the band music an instant. "Four minutes before the next whistle," he answered gruffly.

"Then come out here back of the pad room, I want to have a word with you," Cuddy ordered. The two raised the side wall and stepped out face to face in the sun, Manson with an ugly smile.

"Manson," Cuddy began, "I've heard a lot of talk around the show about some claim you have on Marion

Fortescue. Just what is it?" He could not help thinking, "What an ill-favored chap this Manson is."

"I broke her into the business when she was a kid. I've taught her all she knows. If there was an apprentice law in this country, I'd make a lot of money out of her," Manson mumbled.

"As there isn't any apprentice law," Cuddy reminded him, "please tell me just what claim you have on her."

"I claim that I made her what she is to-day. She owes everything to me and she knows it. I never gave her a wrong steer yet. Is that enough?" The equestrian director was not a pleasant person.

"Not quite. Where did you get her from? What about her people? Where did she come from?" Cuddy just had to find out.

"If you'll excuse me, Mr. Cotter, that's for her to answer. I might tell you, though, that she'll stick to me." He looked steadily and defiantly at Cuddy.

"I see no objection to that," Cuddy replied. "Thanks, Manson." The equestrian director dived under the side wall. In a moment Cuddy heard him whistle for the next act.

"The circus is a big family all right, but I guess there are some slants to its family affairs I'd better keep out of," he concluded. Then he set out to solve his morrow's problem.

The hours between the five o'clock supper and the seven o'clock preparation for the evening performance are the hours for the circus people's rest and recreation.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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These take various forms. The women who have washed their wardrobe in the morning usually iron it after supper in the evening. The male performers who consider themselves letter-perfect usually stage an impromptu ball game. Some of the more studious indulge in chess or checkers under the trees back of the big top. Amateur acrobatic quartettes trifle with those harmonies known as barber-shop chords. The Arabs sing to the accompaniment of Japanese-operated ukuleles. The iron-jawed man indicts sentimental epistles from the top of a property box out in the circus "back-yard"—that canvas inclosure which runs from "back-door," or dressing room entrance, to and around the pad room and the men's and women's dressing rooms. Inside the big top the rings and hippodrome track are filled with human and animal artists practicing on a new feature for some future performance. The older men frequently sit on the reserved seats and smoke the pipe of peace. Jules Turner, veteran clown, was thus meditatively engaged when Cuddy encountered him. Next to Marion and Rony, Cuddy found most consolation in the company of Jules.

"Jules," he said, "I've got a queer notion in my head and I'd like to get your reaction on it."

"How shall we proceed, Mr. Cotter?" the clown answered. "Do you want me to examine you phrenologically? Or shall I smite your cranium in slapstick farce, or slam that clever head into the sawdust in genuine knockabout comedy? Or what would you?"

"I don't know which prescription to take," Cuddy

acknowledged. "It's this way. For various reasons I should like to be on my show and yet not of it during to-morrow's stand. Meaning that I should like to drop out of my rôle as manager to-morrow and be one of the company but without identity."

"A manager incognito," said Jules.

"Something like that," said Cuddy. "I want to be on the show but I don't want any one outside to know that I am here. How can I arrange that?"

The clown smoked silently for a while. A young Arab just in from Aden was throwing cartwheels while his trainer ran beside him and held him by a safety belt around the waist. Four young girls, in gingham rompers, just learning to fly, were "muscleing up" on the Roman rings hung temporarily to quarter poles. Another girl, in her first season as a performer, was practicing a new feat on the swinging ladder. Riders were rehearsing a new finish horse in the center ring, testing him out with "jump ups" from the ground. Chandelier Whitey was doing a little testing of his own—getting his lights ready for the coming performance.

"You do not want the towners in to-morrow's stand to know who or what you are?" Jules resumed.

"That's just it," said Cuddy, brightening.

"Do you know what is the most complete disguise around the show?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Clown white," said Jules.

"You mean the white paint you put on your face?"



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

"Yes. I can make you up so your best friend won't know you."

"Will you do it—to-morrow?"

"Will you play your part?"

"Faithfully."

"You know, Mr. Cotter, I consider clowning an art—almost a lost art, but an art."

"I shall so regard it. But I must remain a clown from dawn until the show is off the lot," Cuddy told him, "if I am to accomplish the purpose I have in view."

"You are giving the orders around this show, Mr. Cotter."

"All right, to-morrow no one shall know anything about a Clarence Cuddington Cotter, no one shall recognize that name if he hears it, no one shall admit he ever heard of such a person."

"And you will be a circus clown?"

"What is a good name for a clown, Jules?"

"We shall call you 'Pierrot.' "

"Good," declared Cuddy.

"And you shall act with me!" exclaimed Jules with rising enthusiasm. "I shall be the posture marker. I shall cue you into the comedy business. It will be glorious! These boys—these punks—who come to us to be made into clowns! What trash they are! They have no brains. They have no ambition! They slap each other! They make much noise. And in two days they are clowns. Bah! They disgust me. But you, you are clever! No doubt in some time past you have

## MANSON AND MARION

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been an actor. There are certain things about you that suggest it. Eh? We shall have great sport to-morrow. Think you not so?"

"I think not so," replied Cuddy. "You pass the word around the dressing room. Rony must manage the show without me. I'll meet you in Clown Alley to-morrow morning. And all during to-morrow there shall be no Clarence Cuddington Cotter. Just Pierrot the Pantaloon."

"Before you go, Mr. Cotter," said Jules, laying a detaining hand on Cuddy's arm, "I'm going to accept the privilege of my years to say one more thing. I am, as circus performers go, an old man. I've had three wives. I know women. All my wives have been good women. You find good women in all social classes. I think there are more good women in the circus than elsewhere. They have to be good. Circus life makes them such. I hope you know and value a good woman when you see one."

Cuddy paused in bewilderment.

"What's the rest of it?" he demanded.

"There is no more," said the clown.

"Doors open!" yelled Lou Riley, official announcer. The clown climbed off the seats and ambled into the dressing room.

## XIV

### CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW

**I**T was Rony Gavin who with managerial judgment suggested a closed car for Cuddy when that ex-collegian essayed to leave the circus train for the circus lot near the campus of Columbus College.

"I don't know why you want to keep under cover here, Mr. Cotter," he said, "although I suspect that this is your old college and you don't want your old pals to get hep. That's your business. But if you're going to make a clean job of it, I'd step from the sleeper on the side away from the towners—who always come down to the train to help us unload—straight into an automobile with curtains on it and beat it for the circus lot and dressing room, and Clown Alley."

"Not bad advice, Rony," said Cuddy, and took it.

"I'm entirely in your hands to-day, Jules," he told the dean of Clown Alley. "Do with me as you will."

"You'll have breakfast sent in from the cookhouse, then I'll make you up for parade," Jules said. "Didn't you tell me you did something musical once upon a time?"

"I used to play the saxophone," Cuddy admitted lamely.

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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"Then you go in the clown band on top of the fourth tableau wagon," the old clown ordered. "There's an old saxophone in one of the clown property trunks. You can have that."

"Thanks," mumbled Cuddy as from the top of a costume trunk he breakfasted on muskmelon, coffee, boiled eggs and toast.

Not long afterwards an amateur clown, attired in a bright-red wig, a tiny feathered cap, green cutaway coat with gold buttons and epaulets, baggy white trousers and elephantine shoes, climbed hand over hand up the front of a towering tableau wagon as the Calkins Circus parade left the lot to tour the environs of Columbus College. Face, ears and neck were a glistening white, save where a great red gash denoted the mouth, three broad red lines radiated across the forehead from the bridge of the nose, two red triangles crossed the cheeks from eyes to ears and two large black dots flanked the nose and gave the impression of wide-open eyes.

Admiring small boys trouped behind him and encouraged his awkward ascent with shout and gesticulation. Strong hands reached from above and assisted him as he rose step by step. Kind words from his fellow buffoons bade him be of good cheer. Hearty congratulations were showered upon him when he had gained the top and flopped onto a hard board seat between two grotesque brethren.

The erstwhile Cuddy Cotter, masquerading as a cir-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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cus clown in his old college town, was in a terrible funk. He was harboring the worst case of stage fright in his rather varied career. He was about to dare all Columbus College to identify him. If he had dared too much he was undone, socially and sentimentally. If he escaped discovery he would be no better off than he had been before, but he would have gotten away with it. And since youth adores the difficult, Cuddy, playing the Pantaloon, was suffering from a combination of exhilaration and trepidation—he was excited to the limit, and nearly scared to death.

“You wouldn’t believe it, Mr. Cotter—I beg your pardon, Pierrot,” said Pete Pardo, “but there’s no better place to study human nature than from the top of a parade wagon. I’ve been riding parades twenty seasons and I know.” Pete, attired in a libelous imitation of a Tut-ankh-a-men costume, grinned through his clown white, and spat upon the slide of his battered trombone.

Cuddy regarded that musical instrument with wonder. “How on earth do you manage to play such a musical cripple?” he demanded.

“Huh,” replied Pete, “better look over the rest of our equipment. Boys, display your musical armament.”

The other clowns proudly exhibited a desperately dented tenor horn, once of shining brass but now a deep sea-green from seasons’ accumulation of tarnish; a dissolute baritone foully incrustated with verdigris, a fly-specked brass cornet, a bell-flattened tuba. Each

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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of the caricatures of musicians on the sun-baked, rumbling wagon-top flourished some wreck of alto, clarinet, drum, cornet, or other musical instrument.

Cuddy shrank from impending possibilities. "And where is my saxophone?" he inquired.

"Here it is," answered Pete Pardo. "Jules dug this up for you 'special.' " Pete grinned again through his mask of clown white.

Cuddy surveyed the tortured mass of keys, tubing, mouthpiece and bell that Pete thrust into his hands. It reminded him of a grossly elongated sea horse, upside down.

"And what do I do with it?" he demanded.

"You make a noise on it every time we break loose," Pete assured him. "Jules has to ride the clown cart in parade. I'm boss on this clown band wagon. You take orders from me. All you have to do when you hear the snare drum roll and the base drum boom is to cut loose with all the blue notes you know how. The cornets carry the lead. The rest doesn't matter. Are you musical?"

"I was," said Cuddy. And he added: "You know, it just happens I never heard the clown band on parade."

"You're going to hear it now," Pete warned him.

"Is it any worse than the clown band in the big show performance?"

"Being an artist and a master of mummery, I'm modest," Pete confessed, "but we've been arrested more than once for disturbing the peace. Let's go." And

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

they went. They went several times. Then Cuddy, who had squawked vigorously on the dismantled saxophone during each rendition of "Bananas," "Three o'Clock in the Morning," "Down on Coney Island," "The Double Eagle," and other popular ditties, intervened with a question:

"Who lays out the street parade routes with this show?"

"Usually the contracting agent. Sometimes the twenty-four man," Pete answered.

"What's the idea? To make them as long as possible?"

"Not necessarily. The main idea is to get close to schools and factories and down most of the main stems, wherever the crowd's apt to be."

"How long do you suppose we'll stay out this time?" Cuddy queried as the four-ton wagon bumped over a railroad crossing.

"Oh, maybe an hour or so," said Pete. "Ah, there!" to a lady fair in a factory window.

"Is it always as hot as this on parade?" Cuddy squirmed.

"This is nothing. It'll be fifty degrees hotter than this before we get back to the lot. Get busy and do some comedy with the folks on the sidewalks, that's part of your job."

Cuddy dutifully grimaced and flapped his hands after the prescribed clown manner to a bevy of young misses who were greatly elated at the demonstration.

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

---

"Don't you ever have springs on these tableau wagons?" he asked.

"Not so you could notice it."

"Or cushions?"

"Not unless you bring them along with you."

"Or umbrellas?"

"Not for the clown band."

"It certainly is getting hot."

"It'll be hotter yet if these college students turn loose."

Cuddy looked about in alarm, then clung to his rocking bench lest he tumble on to the distant pavement. The parade had turned into Chaplin Road and was passing the Rho Epsilon chapter house. Slats and his confrères were on the porch.

"Look out for rough stuff!" shouted Pete, and dodged.

An ancient orange sailed through the air and landed on Cuddy's torso. Another color was added to his costume.

"My word!" said Merle Bennett of the cornet section.

"Do—they—do—that—often?" demanded Cuddy, his hand to his bespattered breast.

"Once in a while, in some of these tough towns," Pete answered. "I remember once down in Pennsylvania some young towners stopped the clown wagon, unhitched the team, and turned the hose on us."

"Suppose they'll think of it here?" from Cuddy.

"Might," from Pete. "Look out!" Cuddy had been



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

"Pete, send some pony punk for Rony, will you?" said Cuddy. "I want to see him."

When Rony appeared, he and Cuddy held conference back of the wardrobe wagon.

"Now you understand what to do, don't you, Rony?" Cuddy asked after the local situation had been thoroughly discussed.

"Absolutely," Rony replied. "But you know the possible results?"

"Yes. I'll take a chance," from Cuddy.

Having prepared a promising day's program, Cuddy went with others from Clown Alley to dinner at the cookhouse in his clown regalia. Once smeared with clown white and its companion colors, the circus jester dislikes to "wash up" just to eat a meal, especially if he knows that within the hour he will have to make up for the afternoon performance. So Cuddy and his brother Joeys dined in character while the towners stared through the cookhouse door and, as the disgusted troupers said, "watched the animals feed."

"When you see how ill-bred towners can be, do you wonder that circus people keep pretty much to themselves?" Marion asked, as she joined him on the way back to the pad room. She had changed from her white parade costume into one of the neat gingham dresses she favored on the lot.

"Some of them are pretty weak on social form," Cuddy acknowledged.

"I was too far in advance of you on parade to see what those students did to you, but I heard about it,"

reclined on a trunk top in the men's dressing room following the parade. The other occupants of Clown Alley were reciting the adventures of the morning with all the enthusiasm of soldiers who had escaped unscathed.

"Really it was most remarkable, y' know," said Merle Bennett. "I've clowned in the old country and over here before I came on this Calkins Show, and I never, y' know, had any bloody bounders try to rough us as these fellows did this morning, y' know. Eh, what?"

"'Tis kind of peculiar," admitted Pete. "Most students are noisy but they hardly ever pull anything like that stuff they handed us on parade."

"Must be some kind of a frame-up against us in this town," Wee Willie Watkins suggested. "Ever play this town before, Pete?"

Pete Pardo scratched his head. "Yeh, think I played it with the McMahon Show in '98, but don't remember that we had any trouble."

"Just a few weeks ago," said Tommy Doolin, the wrestler, looking up from his novel, "as I now recall it, I read there was some rough stuff down at the circus runs here. The student gang may be laying for some other show—and here we are."

"Do you mind rough stuff, Tommy?" asked Cuddy.

"I live on it," was the wrestler's response as he returned to the fascination of Hortense Holliday's escape from the machinations of Simon Filagree.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

looking out—at his beloved Sniggs barking at the circus elephants.

A red ripe tomato was launched from the porch of the Zeta house as Pete sounded his warning. Cuddy, unused to this type of attack, received it on the left cheek. As he unintentionally turned the other cheek he caught sight of Orton Burch, Bushy Thorn and others of his college pals preparing for another assault from ambush. He flattened himself on the wagon top. "The faculty had no business allowing those rowdy boys to come back to college," he growled.

"Battle's over, and you're the only one hit," announced Pete as the parade left Chaplin Road and headed for the circus lot. "Rather a rare experience for us Joeys, I must admit," he added. "Now one more tune and we're done for the morning. Let's play something solemn, 'Work, For the Night Is Coming.'"

The men in motley played with feeling, none more so than Cuddy—for out of the tail of his eye he saw Marjorie Dawson Trent. She was motoring toward him, vivid in her spring sport costume. Cuddy's companions saluted her with an exaggeration of admiration. Cuddy remained mute and motionless. He looked her full in the eye. She returned his look with level glance. There was no sign of recognition. Cuddy breathed again.

"It's tough, but I'm going to get away with it," he thought. "But won't I hand it to the Rhos and my old Zeta friends once I get the chance!"

He reflected on the glory that was Cuddy as he

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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she said. "I think it's a burning shame. No showman would be so unsportsmanlike."

Cuddy smiled wanly through his clown white. "Oh, those students are just boys, you know," he said apologetically. "Most of them are pretty good sports. You've seen a bad side of them that doesn't crop out very often and that really doesn't mean anything."

"You ought to know. You've been a college boy."

"Yes. I've been a college boy. And please be assured that on the average they are an awful nice lot and"—wistfully—"we have some mighty good times, too."

"Are the college girls—nice?"

"The girls in American coeducational colleges are the finest girls in the world."

"Oh. Do you know some of them?"

"Many. Of course."

"'Coeducational' means that boys and girls go to the same school."

"Yes."

"You think that a good idea?"

"It makes fine pals of them. The girls pal with the boys and the boys pal with the girls. They get to understand each other. It's better for all of them."

"You made some friends—among the college girls?"

"Oh, many."

"To what college did you go?"

"Well—one of the colleges in the Middle West."

"You made some dear friends?"

"Y-e-s."



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Among the girls?"

"A few."

"Would they approve of what the boys did to you this morning?"

"They wouldn't understand. It's just a lark to them. You see, they don't know much about circus people. They're really the finest kind of people. I've had some glorious times in college."

"I wish I might have gone to college."

"I wish you might."

"Will there be many college people at the show to-day?"

"Probably a good many. To-night at least."

"Then I shall see them."

"Undoubtedly."

"And will you tell me more about them?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to clown the show to-day?"

"I'm going to play Harlequin to your Columbine."

"That sounds interesting."

"It probably will be."

They parted in the pad room.

Calkins' Circus played to one of the lightest matinéés of the season when Cuddy made his début as a knockabout clown.

"It's more like a spring dress rehearsal," said Jules Turner, as he took Cuddy in charge when the trumpets sounded for the opening spectacle.

"Now you stick to me, and do everything I tell you,"

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

---

the old clown admonished his pupil, as they joined the clown group in its "walk around" during the "spec." "There'll be a big crowd to-night. This is a combination of college town and smoke-stack town, that generally means a good night show business."

For the next two hours Cuddy grimaced and laughed, did funny falls on the hippodrome track and in the rings, shouted loudly when his companions in polycolored costumes slapsticked him or with resounding but painless blows smote him on the cheek, vigorously applauded Marion and the other stars in their particularly thrilling feats, held to the tail of Rajah, when that performing elephant made his exit, and, in other ways, was king's jester to the court of Columbus College held in Calkins' Circus tents.

It was his whim to lead Marion into the ring when the time came for her wire act. He did it with the courtly grace that had won so much praise in the productions of the Columbus College Shakespeare Society. Perhaps he held her hand a bit too firmly, but that was the type of hand Marion possessed. It was small and white and smooth but wonderfully strong, and Cuddy was an adept at holding hands. At any rate, the innovation went well with the public.

"I wonder what put this clowning idea into your mind?" she said, under cover of the band music as he put his hand to his heart and bowed low before her, then saluted as she sprang up the steps and ran out upon the wire.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"I'll never tell, but I'm beginning to like it," he answered, smiling up at her.

"You're a funny boy," she responded as she whirled about on the wire and ran back to her perch while Cuddy cavorted on the ground beneath her.

"I hope the audience thinks so," he added, and with a most successful funny fall tumbled out of the ring and left the star in full possession.

The afternoon passed so peacefully and Cuddy's clowning was so well received by performers and public that he was not prepared for the reaction of the evening. For during the evening performance the student Syrians came down like wolves on the fold and for a while the circus sheep didn't know where to find themselves. In Cuddy's case it was the proverbial pride going before the fall.

It was with the utmost assurance that he had Jules Turner lay a new coat of clown white upon his forehead, face and neck, and new red and black streaks over that. He had worn loose white gloves during the afternoon performance. He decided to take them off at night, for greater comfort. It was hot enough, anyway, in padded clown suits and poreless clown white. And it was evident that his disguise was complete. Jules had said that his own brother would not recognize him, or something like that, and Jules had been right about it.

Jules had also been right about the night's business. Students, factory folks and plain town's people were on hand in thousands. Cuddy thrilled when he peeked

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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through the dressing room curtains at the prospect of appearing incognito before all that throng of boys and girls, men and women with whom he had so long associated.

"It's going to be great to put this over on them," he said.

"Put what? Were you speaking to me?" It was Marion, at his elbow.

"Gracious! I didn't know you were there," Cuddy exclaimed. "I was thinking that I would have a lot of fun playing clown before so many people."

"Who'll never know who you are?"

"That's it. Who'll never know who I am, even when I'm right among them."

He glanced down at his ungloved hands. Through the clown white there glinted an old seal ring that had been in his family for generations. It had encircled the little finger of his right hand for four college years. There were a hundred friends, one friend in particular, in Columbus College, who knew that ring right well. He hesitated a moment. The trumpets sounded for the opening spectacle.

"Do you mind, Miss Fortescue, wearing this ring for me to-night? I'm afraid I might lose it." He pulled it off and without waiting for her answer, slipped it on the third finger of her firm white hand. They took their appointed places in the spectacle and, far apart, marched around the hippodrome track.

The first sign of trouble arose when Cuddy, Jules Turner and Pete Pardo were doing a bit of knock-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

about in front of the blue seats during the principal riding act. The riders had paused to change horses, the band had paused to take breath. The clowns, to fill this break, were engaged in frantic fisticuffs. Cuddy, as victim of a pseudo knockout, fell to the ground. As he fell a bunch of firecrackers fell also on him. They were alight and going off, around his head.

Now fire has its proper place around a circus. It is necessary, and safe, in the cookhouse. It is necessary, and safe, in an oil lamp or torch to mark the way around the lot or to the train at night. It is necessary, and safe, in the circus lights that hang from the center poles at night. But uncontrolled it is a deadly menace, for the circus canvas is paraffined to make it waterproof and one match, to say nothing of one active firecracker, in touch with a circus canvas, means an instant and unquenchable conflagration. It means total destruction and, perhaps, death. The popping firecrackers which fell upon Cuddy had come from the neighboring blue seats, crowded with college students.

Cuddy forgot his rôle for a moment. He jumped to his feet, climbed the seats and seized the boy he thought responsible for the fireworks. The boy happened to be Perry Givens. With him sat Carl Mitchell. Cuddy lunged at Perry. Carl cross-cut Cuddy as he came on. There were twenty property men, performers, ushers and Cuddy mixing it with forty college students in two minutes. Lou Riley, official announcer, was about to make the announcement for the concert.

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

---

Tommy Doolin, wrestler and feature of the concert, stood beside him. They rushed the combatants, with the aid of Pete and Jules. Tommy emerged from the mêlée with Cuddy's collar in his hands. Cuddy's neck was still inside the collar.

"Gentlemen," Lou Riley shouted, "please sit down. This clown will be attended to by us. He has just joined the show. We apologize. We'll take care of him." The band struck up, the riders leaped to their horses, Lou and Tommy hustled the struggling Cuddy into the dressing room.

"I'll fire both of you for this," Cuddy panted.

"Time enough for that when we're out of town," said Tommy. "Do y' want to have your block knocked off by that mob of towners? Let 'em kid the show. They'll get theirs before we're off the lot."

Cuddy snarled at his wrestler. "How?" he demanded.

"Wait till the wrestling match in the concert. I'll handle them then," Tommy snapped at him. "I know American crowds."

Jules intervened. "He's right, Mr. Cotter—I mean, Pierrot. Let the boys have their heads until after the big show. They'll stay for the wrestling match to see their college champion throw Tommy—then watch what we do to them."

"Have a heart, Guv'ner," said Lou. "We know how to handle these college boys. Now please be good."

"All right," was Cuddy's reluctant response. "But there's five or six of them I'd like to get."

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

"Time enough for that," Tommy assured him. "You point them out. I'll fix 'em."

"I'll have to change your make-up and costume before you go into the big top again," said Jules. With Pete's help he introduced Cuddy to the art of the quick change. In ten minutes Cuddy was doing Pete's pet stunt on the other side of the tent. In battered top hat and far flapping evening dress he was offering to ladies his choice rare posies from a bouquet he held. When a lady accepted a flower at his hand she found herself holding the stem only. The flower had returned mysteriously to the clown's bouquet. It was a good hit, one that always went over.

Cuddy had a delightful time with that stunt. He was having a good time in every respect, until he sighted Marjorie, sitting in the first row of the center section of the reserved seats. He had tried to identify her on the seats during the opening spectacle and was greatly relieved that she was not present. Evidently she had come late. Beside her, very much in attendance, sat Slat's Murphy. Cuddy turned cold. He retreated to the dressing room. There Jules found him.

"What's the matter?" the old clown called. "Hurry up and get out on the hippodrome track. We're due there right away."

"Can't. I'm sick," Cuddy groaned.

"Sick? My eye. You were all right a minute ago."

"Honest, Jules. I'm sick," Cuddy insisted.

"Sick, nothing," Jules replied. "Manson doesn't allow any one to be sick in this dressing room. You're

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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a clown to-day, you know. Want to lose the respect of the people who're working for you because you won't take your own medicine? The show has to go on. You made a bet. Don't welch."

Pete Pardo joined the two.

"Why did you two fade away and gum up that bit the three of us had rehearsed?" he demanded. "That went big this afternoon. It would be a riot to-night, although the students are raising Cain with their crazy yells and stunts."

Jules whispered so loudly that Cuddy might hear it. "Hush! Our gallant Pierrot has no stomach for this circus stuff. He is a parlor performer. Or perhaps a woman in disguise—yes—that is it—Pierrot is a woman. Let the lady sleep."

"Ah, well," said Pardo, falling into the business of the impromptu play. "You might be right. If the lady is indisposed we will not disturb her. But," he added, "Marion Fortescue waits at yon dressing-room door to be led forth for further triumphs by one once known as Pierrot. Will you, good Jules, essay to take Pierrot's place?"

Cuddy jumped to his feet. Riley's voice could be heard announcing the coming of the evening star. "And now I have the magnificent pleasure," Lou cried, "to present to you the peer of all the world's aërial artists, the queen of the silver wire—Miss Marion Fortescue. Watch her!"

The band struck up. Cuddy dashed to the dressing-room entrance. Hand in hand Marion and he emerged



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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into the brilliantly lighted big top. Hand in hand they walked into the center ring. With a deep bow he led his lady to the steps whence she ascended to her silver wire. There was a burst of applause. Cuddy cavorted on the ground while Marion danced upon the wire. Then he did his funny fall, tumbled out of the tent into the dressing room and said, so that Jules and Pete might hear, "I'm going all the way through with this clown business."

Through Cuddy went. Through the ordeal of clownish assault and battery in front of his college ladylove. Through the trial and tribulation of making a fool of himself as saxophonist in the clown band. Through the agony of seeing his beloved and bored Marjorie Dawson Trent superciliously smile as Cuddy played the mountebank, the Merry Andrew, before her.

The fun had gone out of the thing long before half his self-appointed task was finished. He had voluntarily assumed the rôle of Harlequin to Marion Foretsue's Columbine. At Marion's every appearance it was his lot to caper, grin, posture and point, to tumble about and act the witling. He finally found himself sadly seeking sympathy from her as he grinned through his mask of clown white. She did not know what was going through his mind. She only knew that his face and body contorted for the pleasure of the multitude. And from time to time she smiled down at him from her horse, her butterfly swing or trapeze. Only Marion's smile kept Cuddy going. For in the middle of the performance, as he was playing Punchinello not

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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ten feet from Marjorie, he saw his college sweetheart yawn and heard her say, quite plainly: "The poor fool. What an awfully tiresome clown."

To which he heard Slats reply: "These circus people are only half wits anyway. He certainly is a rotten clown."

Thereupon a great longing possessed Cuddy to flee the circus and all that went therewith. And there surged within him the supreme desire to speak to Marjorie, no matter how.

The show was over. The crowd, save those who remained for the concert and wrestling match, was streaming toward the opening where they would soon be lost in the darkness. There was no time to lose if Cuddy were to speak to her. He ran through the pad room and around to the front door, seized a bundle of little rubber balloons from an astonished balloon vender, shoved that retainer from his soap box, took his stand in the midst of the outpouring stream and began his call: "Balloons, gentlemen. Who wants a balloon? Only ten cents. Get a balloon for your girls, boys." He saw Marjorie and Slats drifting toward him. Jumping from his box he stood directly in their path. "Balloons, gentleman. Get a balloon for your girl, my friend. Lady, don't you want a balloon?"

Slats looked at the balloons and at Marjorie.

"Here's that ass of a clown again, selling balloons. Want a balloon, Marjorie?" he said.

"No, thank you," she answered. "I've had all the circus I want. Let's hurry along. We have an infor-

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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mal at our sorority house to-night." But she looked closely at Cuddy.

As they passed him, Slats said to her: "Don't you think that was a pretty clever girl who walked the wire?"

"I don't remember her," replied Marjorie, yawning. "I never could identify circus people or Chinamen." She turned her head toward Cuddy.

"Pretty good show though, wasn't it?" Slats went on.

"All circuses look alike to me. Thanks for taking me, Slats, but I think circuses frightfully tiresome," she answered with a puzzled frown.

Cuddy released the balloons and made his way sadly back to the dressing room. He had spoken to Marjorie but it had not made him happy.

"Better get into the big top. Trouble brewing," Jules warned him as Cuddy dropped upon a trunk in Clown Alley.

Cuddy wearily found his feet and the entrance into the big top.

Tommy Doolin, actor and wrestler, was working his college-student audience up to a fighting pitch. Tommy was a master in the art of the framed wrestling match. He had taken on Dug Ward, the champion college wrestler, for a fifteen-minute bout. Dug was to have five dollars for every minute he kept his shoulders off the mat—after the first ten minutes.

Tommy was deliberately roughing Dug. One mo-

## *CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW*

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ment he would push Dug's nose up to that college athlete's forehead. In another moment he would put a finger in Dug's mouth and stretch it almost to that suffering young man's ear. There were cries of "Foul, foul!" from the college boys on the blue seats, cries so loud that they were heard above the clatter of seat planks dropped to the ground by seat men "tearing down" on the opposite side of the tent.

Then Tommy caught Dug in his arms, lifted him high in air, threw him hard upon the mat, fell on him with both knees, then half arose and shook his fists at the college crowd. It was enough. The college boys swarmed off the seats, Orton Burch and Bushy Thorn in the lead, many Rho Epsilon boys following.

Cuddy's sorrow turned to anger. Forgetting his make-up, forgetting everything but the insults given him that day, he rushed forward shouting: "Get 'em, Tommy! Get 'em! That's the bunch! That's the bunch! Right there!"

Tommy "got 'em," with the assistance of a hundred or so canvasmen and seat men, summoned by Boss Canvasman McGinnis' whistle, and suitably armed with tent stakes. Many a gallant college boy fell on the field of battle. Many a circusman carried signs of combat from the lot that night. It was a combination of cane rush, mud fight, freshman class election and unumpired football, with no quarter asked and both sides warning the police to stay out of it. Eventually right and might, as personified by Cuddy's minions,



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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prevailed. The college boys retired in good order, philosophically accepting fortune's ill favor.

As Cuddy stood, clothed in his everyday suit and his right mind, within the darkened pad room, he thought he heard one of the retreating students say in passing: "Cuddy Cotter started this whole thing weeks ago. Then he went away and left us to finish it. Gee! but that wrestler handled Perry Givens and Bushy Thorn awfully rough."

Rony Gavin appeared at the pad room sidewall with a closed taxi. "Jump in," he softly called. "Our men are strung along the route from lot to train, with tent stakes in hand, but this taxi is safer for you—if you still want to keep under cover."

A half mile down the street they overtook Marion trudging calmly toward the train. Cuddy stopped the car. "She should come with us," he said to Rony. Rony jumped out and returned with Marion.

"Weren't you afraid to walk alone to the train following that clem on the lot?" Cuddy asked her.

"I'm never afraid and I've walked from lot to train a thousand nights alone without being annoyed. The towners don't know I'm a trouper," she answered defiantly. Then, earnestly, "Did you enjoy your day of disguise, Mr. Cotter?"

"More or less," said Cuddy.

"That's a South American's answer," she countered.

"What do you know about South America?"

"Toured it with Fipp & Reltus Circus once."

"Once?"

## CUDDY CLOWNS THE SHOW

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"That was enough. Too much yellow fever and bubonic plague when I was in that territory, and too many soft-headed Latin-American *caballeros*," she laughed. "Why must a townner, north or south of the equator, think he must make love to a circus girl?"

"Does he—always?"

"Nearly—always."

A long pause. Rony, former circus treasurer, discreetly treasured his words.

Marion resumed with: "I thought you were not going to have any more clem's on this show."

"Couldn't avoid this one," Cuddy replied. "Some of those college boys needed chastisement." He all but smiled when he thought of Perry Givens and Bushy Thorn. "But," he hastened to say, "you must not judge college people by the few wild ones you saw on the lot to-night or those fellows who threw things at me on parade. Most college people are studious—serious-minded, although we—they—do have lots of honest good times."

"I know," she answered. "I walked through the college grounds on the way to the lot this morning. Then I went back and into some of the buildings between shows this afternoon."

"Indeed! And what did you see that particularly interested you?"

"I spent most of my time in the library."

"That's more than most college students can say," he declared with conviction born of experience.

The taxi rolled past a brilliantly lighted house,

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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through the open windows of which came a vision of swaying couples and the strains of step-starting music.

"Oh! A dancing party!" Marion clapped her hands. "Wouldn't you love to go in there and dance, Mr. Cotter?"

"Oh! Wouldn't I?" exclaimed Cuddy. It was Marjorie Trent's sorority house.

The three rode in silence to the circus train. Cuddy's mind romped around a college triangle with Marjorie, Sniggs and the Zeta house at the corners. Forgotten by its owner, the old seal ring of the Cotter family remained on Marion's hand.

## XV

### TWO—AND A COTTAGE

C UDDY'S circus had wandered into the heart of the wheat country and luck had been with it in all departments, until old Slim Gatten, property man, slipped from his perch near the top of the tent and into the great beyond. Some other property man completed the repairs upon which Slim had been working while a half hundred circus attachés did honor to Slim's mortal remains. The mourners were grouped about a monument in the cemetery at Wahpetan, North Dakota. The monument recalled a circus tragedy that some of the group had witnessed many years before. It was to them touchingly emblematic, showing a broken center pole, from which hung broken ropes and pulleys. A torn and twisted tent drooped from the broken pole to the ground.

The men in the group uncovered their heads as Ganwell's band, neglecting the quicksteps, gallops, jazz and waltzes of their circus program, played "Nearer, My God, To Thee." Men and women in the group bowed their heads. Some wept. Fresh flowers lay upon Slim's grave and the older graves at the base of the monument. It was a serious Sunday with the Calkins show. Cuddy stepped forward, hat in hand.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Friends and Fellow Professionals," he said. "Perhaps I should have had some local preacher here to express for us what I shall now try to say. We've had preachers on the lot many times since I took charge of this show. But to-day we are gathered for a simple ceremony which we can understand better than any-outsider, preacher or layman.

"Slim and the other circus folks who lie here in their last sleep died in the performance of duty, just as you may die some day. We in the circus business are accustomed to taking chances. It's all in our day's work and the show has to go on. Some of you were here in the blow-down of 1897. Certain men stayed at their stations. There was nothing unusual in that. You would all do the same under similar circumstances. Those showmen died on their jobs just as Slim did. We come to pay our humble respect to their memory. And I know we all thank God that none of us died when the big storm struck us at Dundonald this spring. You took your chances then as you always take them. I've learned a lot about people since I came on this show, but I think about the biggest thing I've learned is that you can always bank on the bravery of a showman, on his bravery and his devotion to duty. So I just want to pay this little tribute to you who are among the living, to tell you that I never met a gamer bunch than you are. And now let's bow our heads in silent prayer for those who here sleep their last sleep."

The little group remained in reverent attitude while a woman's voice was raised in "Abide with Me."

Then Micky O'Mara of the stables, Pop McGinnis of the canvas, Jules Turner of Clown Alley, Marion Fortescue of the Five Flying Fortescues, riding artistes, razorbacks, rough-necks, animal trainers, department managers and the others of the half hundred trooped slowly back to the circus lot and prepared for the grind of the week to follow.

The cemetery scene was not new to them. They had participated in similar ceremonies at other graves of showmen in every part of the country. Traveling folk they were, leading a semigypsy life, but they all knew that at the end of their season called "life" they were going on the long, long journey, for which there is no route sheet. And they contemplated the end with serenity, for most of them lived according to their lights, cleanly and unselfishly, and accepted what fortune brought them with a certain fatalism, sometimes with a certain carelessness.

Marion Fortescue was trying to explain this showman's philosophy to her employer as she and Cuddy walked through the town and discussed matters of life and death as young people will.

"All of us in the profession know that sooner or later we must leave the road," she said. "Many performers stay in the ring until they are fifty or more, but most of them are less fortunate. A fall, a railroad wreck, a blow-down, some serious illness puts them in the hospital. The show goes on and leaves them. For a while the friends in the dressing room write to the friend they have left on the sick bed. Then

## CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS

---

in the hurry and hustle of circus life, the hard days and soft days, the dark days and bright, the healthy troupers, traveling from town to town, a thousand miles or more from where their old friend dropped out of the company, write less and less to him or her. Then one day on the lot some performer picks up *The Billboard*—our weekly Social Register—and in glancing over its pages he sees a little item like :

“ ‘Gertrude Robbins is ill in the hospital at Waco, Texas, and would like to hear from her friends.’ That means that Gertrude has spent whatever money she may have saved up, is dead broke and must have help or become a charity patient. Plenty of old performers are charity patients, to our shame be it said. But human nature is human nature, in and out of the show business. Whenever the dressing room runs across an item like that some one takes up a collection, usually a pretty generous one, the money is sent back to Gertrude or whoever it may be. Then the show closes its season, the company scatters, and the down-and-outer is forgotten, perhaps for all time.

“Do you remember that picture, ‘The Wounded Comrade,’ I think they call it? A wild elephant has been shot by a big-game hunter. The wounded animal staggers, with a bullet somewhere in its vitals. Two unwounded members of the herd dash up to support the wounded one. They get the hunter’s victim between them, hold him up and urge him on. In time he drops. They stand a moment watching their prostrate comrade before they make for the jungle. That’s what

happens to most wounded troupers. That's what may happen to me some day. I'm not worrying. I'm trying to play the game, go straight and save my money. But I've seen many a performer laid on the shelf since I first joined out."

"I suppose it's a bully thing that we don't know that Old Man Jinx is waiting for us around the corner," Cuddy answered. "But I'm just like you, I'm trying to play the game as I find it and not to worry. I must admit, though, that if you hadn't backed me up the way you have, I'd have lost my nerve and quit the circus long ago. You know, I owe a great deal to you, Miss Fortescue."

"You owe me nothing, Mr. Cotter. I like a fighter."

"You inspired me to fight."

"I'm glad to have done something in a good cause. It has paid you to fight."

"Sometimes I hardly know myself," Cuddy admitted. "Before I inherited this circus, my hardest fighting was in college—to get dances with the right girls at the college balls."

"You miss those right girls?"

"Not so much as I thought I would." His eyes were as frank as his lips. If he hadn't been talking to a circus girl Cuddy would have assured himself that Marion Fortescue had charm. She certainly had freshness. She was wholly healthy in mind and body. Two months of trouping with Calkins' Circus had taught him that. He had gotten that idea during the first two days on the circus lot. The idea had been growing



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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ever since. He felt that he knew her better than any girl in the world, even better than his college sweetheart, Marjorie Dawson Trent. It is pretty hard to camouflage character in a circus company. Its members are thrown too much together under too wide a variety of circumstance. Marjorie and college had a strong hold on him. His heart told him that, every day. But he loved his circus life. It was pretty tough, sometimes, but there was never a dull day on the circus job.

Marion Fortescue, being an artist, could charm a circus audience or a young man from college or she could completely efface herself. And now, having skillfully effaced herself for five minutes, she interrupted Cuddy's meditation.

"Did Watertown Weed tell you he wanted to see you, Mr. Cotter?"

"Oh, damn!" said Cuddy, emerging from his trance.

"I beg your pardon." Marion could be haughty.

"I beg your pardon," was Cuddy's contrite reply. "That didn't sound nice, coming from a circus owner who has forbidden swearing on the lot. You certainly brought me back to business with a bump. And I was having the most gorgeous dream!" He looked longingly toward the setting sun. "There was a little pink cottage on the shell road along the soft sand beach at Pass Christian. In the yard around the cottage were great live oaks bearded with gray Spanish moss. It was December but there were magnolia trees in bloom and great beds of roses and hibiscus bushes, and hedges

## TWO—AND A COTTAGE

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of blue plumbago. Red and purple bougainvillea climbed the cottage walls. Out on the clear blue Mexican Gulf the sailboats lazily rolled. And as evening came on, and the moon rode high, and a mocking bird, perched right above the porch, began his repertoire of unscored operatic airs, I reached over and whispered: 'Journey's end. The season's closed.' "

"To whom did you whisper?" Marion had lived a life of discipline but she was much more human than divine.

Cuddy was still annoyed by the abrupt awakening from his dream. He gazed with rare resentment at the star performer of Calkins' Circus. "I refuse to answer," he said to the Queen of the Arena.

"You've answered already. It's some one you left back in college."

"Why did you din Watertown Weed's mundane name into my ear when I was communing with my poetic and prophetic soul?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cotter. I'm only keeping my promise to Weed. He is very anxious to see you. Says he has important news for you."

"Ah, well, we live by contrast, I suppose," Cuddy sighed. "It was a peachy dream. I should apologize for indulging in it when you and I are walking in the gloaming or near-gloaming of Wahpetan, North Dakota. But it meant more—to me than you might think. I—"

"Yes?" Marion's voice was delicately encouraging.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"That's all," Cuddy declared with determined finality. "You've jerked my mind back to business. Now, where's Weed?"

"Probably in the animal tent," she replied coldly.

"I'll go see him," said Cuddy. "Good night, Miss Fortescue."

"Good night, Mr. Cotter."

Marion went to the dressing room, opened her wardrobe trunk and got out her riding whip. "I'd like to use it on myself," she muttered. "Sometimes I'm hopelessly stupid."

"And if you don't use it, I will, on you," said Manson over her shoulder. "If you don't quit that simp I'll jump the show with you or I'll sap him for keeps."

## CHAPTER XVI

### CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT

**W**ATERTOWN WEED, boss animal man, offered one of the contrasts to which Cuddy had so recently referred. Marion Fortescue was dainty, delectable, disarming. Watertown Weed was a boss animal-man. In his personality he was a composite of the personalities with which he was surrounded. He was as hairy as an ape, as careless about water as a camel, as huge as an elephant, as restless as a hyena, as homely and kind-hearted as Bam, the bulldog mascot of the menagerie. He grudgingly credited human beings with a place of passing importance in the scheme of things, but his idea of heaven was a transplanted and transformed Garden of Eden densely inhabited by all the animals from the Ark, intensively educated by Watertown Weed. He had just made a great discovery.

"Guv'ner," Weed hailed Cuddy with enthusiasm, "look here! On page six of *The Billboard!* Bushman's circus is being sold at auction in Chicago next Saturday."

"That leaves me cold, Weed. Why the excitement?" said Cuddy, his mind on Pass Christian and the girl on the moonlit porch.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Bushman's got an elephant you want. It's Babylon, one of the best trained bulls in the business. I've known that bull for fifteen years. He's no dummy, believe me. Asiatic, of course. Don't ever fall for one of them African bulls. They've got big ears and make a big flash with the rubes, but you can't teach them nothing. Now this Babylon bull! Guv'ner, that bull works in the ring, single, double or triple. He works in harness if you want a chariot pulled in the parade or grand entry. He'll push any wagon out of the mud single-handed. He's a big bull. Weighs more'n three tons. Guv'ner, you just got to grab that bull. Bet you can get him for two thousand dollars."

"It'll cost me two thousand dollars to catch Calkins and make him and Goldman confess they conspired to beat me out of this show with a phony bill of sale," Cuddy answered. "Why buy more property when I'm hanging on by my eyebrows?"

"We need another bull for Miss Fortescue's elephant act. Two of them is all right, but Rajah's getting worse and worse on signals. Please, Guv'ner. Go into Chicago and bid for that bull. Bulls have been scarce since the war."

"Why don't you go yourself?"

"You know I can't leave this show for a day, Guv'ner. Two of them lions is sick. Weaver isn't working those seals the way he should. I'm fillin' in on the monks and dogs in Number Two ring, until Tony, the

## *CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT*

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punk, gets well. I got to stay with the show. You go, Guv'ner."

Cuddy consulted his route sheet. That did not increase his friendliness toward Weed's idea.

"I've lost about five thousand dollars on this trip into the grain country already," he growled. "Hawkins is a bum general agent. He jumped us from Indiana to North Dakota in eight stands. Just look at that route: Fowler, Indiana; La Salle, Illinois; Warren, Illinois; Independence, Iowa; Lyle, Minnesota; Chaska, Minnesota; Montevideo, Minnesota, and Wahpetan, North Dakota." Cuddy grunted with disgust.

"Then Hawkins finds we're here too early and that the hot winds have dried up the wheat fields, so he jumps us right back east again through Litchfield, Minnesota; Lake City, Minnesota; Sparta, Wisconsin, Baraboo, Wisconsin; Janesville, Wisconsin; Woodstock, Illinois, Auburn, Indiana. Those jumps average a hundred miles each, twice the minimum railroad haul, and not two good towns on the list. I certainly have burned up that Hawkins boy by wire."

"I'm sorry about the route, Guv'ner." Weed refused to be sidetracked. "But that Babylon bull'll be worth ten thousand dollars on the season, after I get him working with our Baldy and King bulls."

Cuddy began to weaken.

"Miss Fortescue will be awfully tickled to have that Babylon bull in her elephant act, Guv'ner." Weed drove that shot home.

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Oh, all right, Weed." Cuddy surrendered. "I'll jump on to Chicago and look in on the auction."

"Thanks, Guv'ner." Weed, having won his boss, charged upon his helpers. "You dummies!" he shouted. "How many times have I got to tell you to take those bulls outside to brush them off? Want to keep all the dust in North Dakota inside this animal top?"

Cuddy took the train for the auction.

There are auctions and auctions and auctioneers and auctioneers. Cuddy, still a simp in many matters, was not familiar with the crooked circus auction, neither was he familiar with the fine points of performing elephants and he had no good friend to guide him. By that mysterious grapevine route, swifter and more effective than the telegraph, Bushman had Cuddy's number before Cuddy alighted from the passenger train at the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Station in Chicago.

"Pass the word to the bidders that I'm going to unload that bad bull, Robber, on a simp named Clarence Cuddington Cotter. That's the simp that took the Calkins show away from Calkins and then ran Sol Goldman and his grifters away from the show." Thus did Bushman issue orders to his lieutenants. "Tell the bidders—I mean the wise ones—that they can make their bids for Babylon on Robber, see? No one wants Robber. I sure don't. But when we get through

## *CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT*

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bidding, Robber'll belong to Cotter, the simp. Serves him right for butting into the show business."

Cuddy walked into the auction barn and introduced himself to Bushman. He was promptly made much of by bidders and by-bidders, touts, pluggers and non-bidding bystanders. The auction proceeded.

"Once more. Last call. Last chance. Going, going. G-o-n-e! Sold to Mr. Cadigan over there, at a bargain."

Mr. Cadigan, Cuddy's bitter rival, had bid in a gilded cage into which he would put Cuddy knew not what bird. Cadigan had been an active bidder from the opening of the auction. And Cadigan had been among the first of the showmen present to make much of Cuddy.

"That was a nice little bit of opposition we had back in Ohio," he remarked as he seized Cuddy's unprepared hand. Cuddy returned the greeting rather lamely. "Oh, don't bother about a little thing like opposition," Cadigan laughingly urged him. "That's all in the day's work. You're initiated now. A regular showman. He's one of us, eh, Keller?" Cadigan was a jovial soul. The world was his oyster. He liked it.

Keller, whose circus had recently joined Cadigan's in an earnest and active endeavor to break Cuddy and his show, rallied Cuddy upon the affair. He was even more friendly than Cadigan to the young showman who had beaten them at their own game. He never nursed a grudge.

"You certainly put one over on us with that Com-



mercial Club stunt of yours," he reminded Cuddy. "Some sharp little showman, you are, Mr. Cotter. You noticed we ran away when we'd had enough. You doing some bidding to-day?" He proffered a fat cigar.

"Don't know yet," answered the still cautious Cuddy. He was vastly pleased that his enemies should be willing to let bygones be bygones. He felt more at ease among these magnates of the circus world.

"The next lot," announced the auctioneer, "is two seventy-foot steel flat cars, made at Mount Vernon, Illinois. You all know the manufacturer. Most of you gentlemen have inspected the goods. What am I offered?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Cuddy. He hadn't thought of buying flat cars when he entered the auction barn, but he needed two flat cars badly.

"Oh, come," said the auctioneer. "Those cars cost one thousand, five hundred dollars new. They've only been used three months. Not buckled or strained in any way. Paint's hardly been scratched on them. Carry a third more than sixty-foot wooden flats."

"Six hundred dollars," said another bidder.

"Eight hundred dollars," said Cuddy. And he got them at that figure.

"Some bargain!" said Cadigan to Cuddy.

"Dirt cheap!" Cuddy was told by Keller.

Then Cuddy sat back and watched showmen from all parts of the country bidding on the paraphernalia of the late-lamented Bushman's World's United Shows. Sharp eyed, with memo books in hand, they sat on

## *CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT*

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the tiers of blue seats rising in front of the auctioneer's stand, while heavy baggage wagons, bales of canvas, cages, ropes and tackle, poles, stakes, seat jacks, seat planks, monkeys, bears, band-wagons, bespangled circus wardrobe, plumes and harness, stock cars, side show banners, circus lights went under the hammer.

Cadigan and Keller, one on each side of Cuddy, put in an occasional bid. So did representatives of a dozen other shows. But the most consistent bidder was old Dad Ball of Kirdville, Missouri.

"What is he bidding so regularly for?" Cuddy asked his companions.

"Dad makes a business of outfitting shows," they explained. "He buys up all the busted ones, keeps the stuff on his farm near Kirdville, and sells it out again to the new shows. Made a million at it in last ten years." Dad, an ancient showman, was busy making notes and purchases.

Cuddy filed the address in his mind against the time when he would make of Calkins' show the very greatest of all the great shows. As a circus manager, Cuddy was coming along. He was ten thousand dollars ahead of the game since he had joined the Calkins Show at Roanoke, Virginia. He might get back the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars his late father had sunk in that circus. He was pondering upon the possibility of cleaning up fifty thousand dollars during the season when the auctioneer offered the elephants for inspection of the bidders. There was a stir among the showmen present.

"Just two bulls to be sold to-day, gentleman," the auctioneer suavely announced. "This first one here, a fine upstanding bull called," he whispered to Bushman, "called Babylon, gentlemen, is the best of the two." The auctioneer swept the tiers of seats with his professional glance. "You will note that Babylon is a splendid bull. Height, nine feet, one inch; weight, nine thousand pounds; age, twenty-nine years; good all-round performer, kind and docile, will work on the lot or in the ring. What am I offered for this choice bull, gentlemen?"

Cuddy felt the tenseness in the audience of buyers. They all seemed on the point of bidding at once. Cuddy popped up with: "Five hundred dollars."

There was a moment of silence, then the bidding became spirited. Cadigan, Keller, many men whom he did not know, jumped into the game. "Six hundred dollars. "Seven hundred dollars." "Eight hundred dollars." The bidding had gone to one thousand dollars before Cuddy could get his breath. "One thousand, five hundred dollars," he shouted. He was excited now, and determined. If Weed wanted this Babylon elephant and Marion Fortescue wanted it, then Babylon they should have if his money held out. He had but three thousand dollars with him. There was another pause. The showmen looked around at each other. Then the bidding started again. Cadigan, Ball and Keller led the attack. "I just got to have that Babylon bull," Cuddy heard Keller say to Cadigan.

## *CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT*

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"Two thousand dollars," Cuddy shouted. The other bidders fell sharply away.

"Last call! Last chance! Going. Going. G-o-n-e! And sold to Mr. Clarence Cuddington Cotter of the Calkins show," the auctioneer announced, striking the board in front of him with a huge wooden mallet. Cadigan and Keller hastened to congratulate Cuddy. "You sure bought something," they declared in unison. Ball and the other bidders smiled cordially at Cuddy.

In fifteen minutes the auction was over. Robber, "the bad bull," had been brought out and, much to Cuddy's surprise, had sold, after hot bidding, at four thousand dollars. Cuddy might have meditated upon this puzzling price had not Bushman hurried him to the elephant stalls. Cuddy was willing to be hurried, because he wanted to get back to the show with his latest acquisition.

"Here is your receipt, Mr. Cotter," said Bushman, as Cuddy counted out the currency to cover the purchase price. "The flat cars you bought are in the Panhandle yards. You can arrange to have them—the cars—forwarded by the railroad to your show almost any time."

Cuddy inspected his elephant. "I'll come back and get him after dinner," he said, addressing the elephant keeper. "By the way, keeper, what's your name and salary?"

"Salter Simmons, Guv'ner," said the bull man. "I



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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got forty dollars a month on the Bushman show." Simmons wiped his chin with his coat sleeve.

"I'll take you on at that," said Cuddy as he hastened out to hire a stock car for the accommodation of his new purchase.

When Cuddy returned to the auction barn at two o'clock circus seats, circus paraphernalia, bidders, buyers, auctioneer, Bushman and Salter Simmons were nowhere in sight. The only visible reminder of the morning's auction was Cuddy's elephant. As Cuddy approached that animal, the elephant swung at him with his trunk. Cuddy jumped and dodged.

"Oh ho! Tried to sap me, old-timer," he said. "I thought they said you were a good bull." He backed away to survey the swaying, gray bulk. The elephant rattled the chains around his left hind leg. It was cold and gloomy in the barn. Cuddy felt a sudden longing for human company. He peered at the restless pachyderm. Through the gloom he saw something white on the wall near the elephant. Cautiously he secured possession of it, dodging another swipe from the elephant as he did so. Carrying his find to a window he unfolded a roughly penciled and tobacco-stained note and read:

"Sorry you were stung, Guv'ner, but this here bull isn't Babylon. This bull's named Robber. He's got the name of being a bad bull, an outlaw. I ain't afraid of him but I got to blow him 'cause I'm working for Bushman and he's got me a job with Ball. But I'll tell you how to handle Robber. Don't ever come up from behind on his right side cause Robber's blind in his right eye. That

## *CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT*

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makes him nervous. So if you come up on him from the right side he'll get scared and maybe sap you. Always come up on his left side. That's his good side. You can handle him all right, then. He knows English. Just talk to him simple. He works with words like 'Lay down. Walk lame. Get up. Pivot.' The regular routine. Robber'll do about a two minutes' single act in the ring, including tub work. He'll also work with other bulls. But don't forget that if any noise happens on his blind side he gets scared and is apt to lam. Once he starts to lam he's hard to catch. Hope you can read this letter. Good luck. Salter Simmons. P.S. Robber hasn't killed anybody I know of. Not this season."

The big beast swayed back and forth, back and forth at the end of his clanking chain. His trunk feinted in divers directions. Cuddy stood squarely in front of him, just out of reach of the trunk. He looked Robber in that elephant's one good eye. It was the baddest good eye Cuddy had ever seen. For the first time Cuddy noted that Robber had two tusks, a long one and a short one.

"I wonder what 'lam' means!" he pondered. His experience with elephants had been vicarious. He had not heard the word "lam." The gloom in the barn increased. The elephant swayed more and more. His trunk described figure eights in the air. The little finger at the trunk's end kept curling and twisting. "Looks like they put one over on me," thought Cuddy.

"Are you tweaking your nose at me?" he demanded. The elephant emitted a nervous squeak. "Mice?" asked Cuddy. "I must get you out of this barn before

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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dark. Always said I'd try anything once. Here goes."

Cuddy walked boldly up to the elephant named Robber. That outlaw wrapped his trunk around Cuddy.

"Robber," said Cuddy in his most commanding voice, "for better or for worse you and I are joined together and let no man part us until I deliver you to Weed on the Calkins show."

Robber grunted. He shook the chains on his left hind leg. Robber's little finger on the end of his trunk searched the pockets of Cuddy's coat. Cuddy caressed the trunk.

"You'll like Weed," Cuddy continued. Salter Simmons had told him to talk "simple" to Robber. He'd talked to everything but elephants since he had joined the circus. "You'll like Weed," said Cuddy. "He's a first-class animal man. Very kind-hearted is Weed. Not handsome, you know, but kind, especially to animals. As for Miss Fortescue, she's about the nicest girl and the finest artist I know of. You'll work in her act if you're good. You'll like her, too. Immensely." It struck Cuddy that he was carrying on a one-sided conversation. Robber again rattled his chains.

"Oh, that's it, Robber. You want to get out? That suits me. I don't fancy spending the night in here with you alone. Now, go easy."

Cuddy slowly unwound the affectionate trunk. Slowly he reached up and rubbed Robber back of that elephant's left ear. Robber registered pleasure. More slowly still Cuddy felt his way along the side of the

## *CUDDY BUYS AN ELEPHANT*

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swaying bull whose body became more massive in the gathering gloom.

"Hang the bull," Cuddy muttered. "I wish he'd stand still a second. Why do elephants have such rough exteriors? Here's where I try one of Marion Fortescue's tricks." He reached up and tentatively scratched the elephant's bulging side. The result was all he could have desired. The elephant's skin rippled. Its sides fairly shook. "I hoped I might make you see a joke," said Cuddy, "and now that you're good-natured—" He bent down and unhooked the chain from Robber's left hind leg. Then he cautiously stood up and tickled Robber's ribs once more. Robber rumbled. "First time I ever heard an elephant laugh," thought Cuddy. His head encountered something hard on the edge of the stall. He reached up back of his head, and brought down an elephant hook. "Now that was very decent of Salter Simmons," he said. Then to Robber: "Come on, Robber, let's go."

Cuddy gently hooked Robber in the trunk. Robber refused to move. "Must be some way out of this situation," said Cuddy. Robber once more felt in Cuddy's pockets. "He wants food," thought Cuddy, and went in search of some. Ten minutes later Cuddy was back in the barn with an armful of bread. He held a loaf toward Robber. Robber advanced and took it. "Eureka!" shouted Cuddy. Robber followed him to the doors. Cuddy opened them wide. There was plenty of room but Robber refused to pass. A small boy appeared on the scene. Cuddy was in-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

spired. "Ever see a pet elephant before?" he asked the urchin.

"Seen 'em in a circus," the urchin answered. His bare toes wiggled with excitement.

"Ever had one to play with?" suggested Cuddy.

"Nope, not never."

"Then I'll show you a new game, buddy," Cuddy said in soft-voiced confidence. "Here's the way we'll play it. This is my pet elephant, Robber. He's very fond of little boys. I'm taking him home to the Pan-handle yards. You can go along ahead of us and feed him this bread. When we get home I'll give you this nice five-dollar bill. How's that for a game? I'll walk along by his side and prod him with this hook."

"Some fun, I bet," quoth the urchin.

Cuddy blessed the fates that gave him a dark night and an illy lighted road to his destination in the railroad yards. He was in no mood to lead a procession through the streets of Chicago. He blessed the kind-hearted brakeman who helped him find a platform from which Robber could be loaded into the waiting stock-car. He blessed the good fairies who made his way easy in the matter of waybills, freight charges and the other details incident to his departure. Then, as the freight train with his car and its burden rolled out of the yards and started for the east, he found a nice soft spot on the floor of the car, thirty feet from his elephantine charge and, wrapping himself in the mantle of exhaustion, curled up and routed himself into the Land of Nod.

## XVII

### A BAD BULL LAMS

FOUR days thereafter a travel-tired elephant named Robber and a travel-sore young man named Cuddy, peeking through the sides of a frightfully tiresome stock car at Painesville, Ohio, feasted their red-rimmed eyes upon the spreading canvas of Calkins' Classical Circus. Cuddy, his private car and its great, gray burden, had missed the show at Auburn, Indiana, on Monday; at Fostoria, Ohio, on Tuesday; at Lorain, Ohio, on Wednesday. For four days Cuddy had acted as nurse and chef to his pachydermic charge. Cuddy had lived on such meals as he could hastily snatch at railroad stations. Robber had lived entirely upon the bread which Cuddy proffered. Robber would eat in no other way. He had grown passionately fond of his new master. Cuddy had gotten his fill of elephants.

Feebly the master of Calkins' Circus fell out of the stock car, shook his benumbed limbs and crawled toward the circus tents. Robber trumpeted his protest at being left alone. Feebly Cuddy limped into the presence of his boss animal-man.

"Weed," said Cuddy as that time-tried animal

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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trainer stared at the ghost of his circus boss, "go and get that bull you bunked me into buying. And remember, Weed, that bull's name isn't Babylon, it's Robber, and he's a bad one. Don't come up on him from the right side or he'll lam." Whereupon Cuddy sank on to a bale of hay and into a comatose condition.

Journeying east toward New England territory, Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair showed to profit-paying thousands at Meadville, Pennsylvania, and at Jamestown, Corning, Ithaca and Troy, New York. It was a beautiful territory in which to troupe—over the Pennsylvania Hills, through the lake region of central New York and into the Hudson River Valley.

By the time the show reached Nashua, New Hampshire, Cuddy was able to look upon the world with an unjaundiced eye, but he hated Robber with a deep, undying hatred. That half-blind pachyderm lamented and was discontented unless Cuddy was with him. Never was sound affection so sadly misplaced, so lacking in return.

"Do you really think you've got to put that outlaw, Robber, into Miss Fortescue's act?" Cuddy demanded of Weed for the fiftieth time.

"That Robber bull's perfectly safe and Rajah isn't," Weed insisted, as he began to rewind his elephant hook. "Miss Fortescue and I have rehearsed Robber for a week with the other two bulls, Baldy and King. There's no chance of his lamming if you handle him

right. It just takes a little change in the routine. You know how these bulls work. Every move the trainer makes in the ring means some move for them to make. We've changed the routine for Robber just enough so that Miss Fortescue always comes up on his left side where he can see her. That's all there is to it."

"Why don't you take Miss Fortescue out of that elephant act?" demanded Cuddy. "She's too fine an artist to be working in an animal-act like that, taking such chances."

"You know how it is, Guv'ner." Weed continued to rewind his elephant hook. "There isn't one woman in a thousand who can go through the same routine twice a day without forgetting something or making some change in the way she works the act. That's the trouble with women performers. But Miss Fortescue, she's always just the same. You can depend on her to do just what she's told to do."

"I don't like it," Cuddy insisted. "Having her handling elephants. And Manson, who broke her into the business, is dead against it."

"It's fun for her, Guv'ner. She's only twenty years old and she's not afraid of anything and she's never had any trouble with an elephant yet."

"If she ever does, Weed, particularly with this Robber bull, and I can catch you afterward, I'll kill you." Cuddy tightened his hold on the animal trainer's arm.

"I understand, Guv'ner," Weed said, laying down his elephant hook, standing up and putting a hand on Cuddy's shoulder. "But there's no one on the show



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

more thought of than Marion Fortescue and there's no one on the show that thinks more of her than I do. I've known her since she was ten years old. Nothing will happen to her. I'll be responsible. Ask her how she feels about it."

Cuddy did ask Marion that Sunday afternoon. They sat on canvas chairs in the shade of a tree at the corner of the circus lot, apart from the troupers and the usual Sunday crowd of towners.

"I'm not trying to direct your professional work just because I'm owner and manager of this show and you happen to be drawing a salary from me," he commenced. "But I've not been reconciled to your handling elephants from the first time I saw you in the ring. Even laying aside the element of danger, which you refuse to consider, the whole thing goes against my grain. You're not the type for that kind of an act. Your riding, wire walking, aërial work—that is all pure artistry. It is as beautiful as yourself. Even your friend, Manson, agrees with me on that."

Marion's cheeks became a deeper pink. "That's a very nice way of putting it," she said. "Only leave Mr. Manson out of it."

"Well, don't you agree with me, except as to Manson?"

"In part," she answered. "I know it seems awfully queer to you that I should be an elephant trainer. I sometimes think that way about it myself, but you must remember I have been doing that sort of thing for

many years. I'm much happier in my other work, but I cling to animal acts. Do you know why?"

"I can't imagine," said Cuddy, deftly catching and crushing a yellow butterfly which had settled on his knee.

"I think it's because those elephants could smash me just as you've smashed that poor flying thing," she answered. "I suppose all of us like to have some kind of power. You like the power that keeps you at the head of this circus, although circus life is far from any you knew three months ago. Lawyers like to show their power over witnesses and jury. Bankers like to show their power over those who borrow from them. I like to show my power over those big beasts who stand on their heads at the crack of my whip. It's just the cave man in all of us."

"And you want to go through with this Robber idea—put that outlaw bull in your elephant act to-morrow?"

"Why not? I'm not afraid of him, and he is of me."

"I give up, Miss Fortescue," said Cuddy. "Robber goes into the act to-morrow. What book are you reading?"

Her cheeks grew rosier as he took the book from her hands.

"I didn't know you read Macaulay, Miss Fortescue."

"I've been reading a great deal during the past three months," she confessed.

"What besides Macaulay?"

"Well, anything I find in the bookstores. Dickens, Robin Hood, Chesterton, James Whitcomb Riley, The

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Idylls of the King, Stevenson, Henry James. Jules Turner, the clown, helps pick them out."

"Not James! Do you understand him?"

"I think so. I'm trying, with Jules' help. He likes to read."

"You have more optimism than I," Cuddy declared.

"I have no one but Jules to tell me what to read," she answered.

"Do you read stories about wild animals?"

"No. What I know about them I learn at first hand."

"It's quite the fad now to read Coué and others on auto-suggestion, self-help, self-analysis, you know."

"I don't think that comes from books."

"And novels? Love stories?"

"I'd rather get that part of life from life itself."

Cuddy leaned toward her and gently replaced the Macaulay in her hands. Their fingers touched.

"Perhaps you're right, Miss Fortescue," he said. They sat in silence while he finished his cigarette. "Please be careful to-morrow," he cautioned as he left her to confer with Rony Gavin on some plans proposed by that assistant general manager.

"Of course," she answered. "That's part of the business. And you see how Robber is—perfectly gentle, he's a pet."

Robber, the outlaw elephant, had indeed become the pet of the show. Eight days in the Sunday school atmosphere of Calkins' Classical Circus had apparently reformed him. Whatever his record might have been

—and Weed had looked it up and found it bad—the big beast was the friendliest, most tractable of animals. He made up with Rajah, the elephant he replaced in the trained elephant act. He became quite pally with Baldy and King, his new performing partners. He went through the routine of rehearsals as if he enjoyed them as much as the audiences were supposed to enjoy the future performances. He responded promptly to every signal Marion gave him. He pushed heavy baggage wagons around the lot with ease and alacrity. Every person on the show from Crackerjack Cullen, the candy butcher, to Jules Turner, the dean of clown alley, played with him in off hours.

“There’s a lot of bunk about bad bulls,” Weed explained to Cuddy. “All this Robber bull’s been needing was a good trainer. I can do anything with him, so long as I remember that blind right eye. This last rehearsal’s proved that.”

“Robber handles better than any elephant I ever worked in the ring,” Marion insisted as she waited, frocked and booted, at the dressing-room door for the opening of the elephant act.

Ganwell’s band crashed into an introductory march. The gigantic gray trio in single file paced rapidly around the hippodrome track from menagerie tent to ring curb. Marion ran into the ring, saluted the audience, and put the elephants through their paces. As though they had always performed together, old Baldy, King and Robber stood on their heads, waltzed, lay on their sides, sat on the great blue tubs, stood on



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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their hind legs and went through the routine in perfect unison.

Cuddy, sitting in the reserved seats, twenty feet from the ring, bade his fears depart. Weed, standing at the ring side, congratulated himself on his good judgment in adding Robber to the act. Marion, running backward and forward in the ring, cracking her whip and calling her commands with accustomed precision, was elated as to the nicety with which her new charge responded. The circus audience, knowing nothing of the dangerous experiment made before their eyes, gave the girl "hand" after "hand." The performance went so smoothly that even the show people clustered in the connection between big top and menagerie and at the door to the dressing room, watching "the new bull being worked," forgot what every showman knows—that an elephant, most timid of beasts, is apt to do anything under the influence of stage or other fright. Frequently he reverts to form, especially if he is startled.

Robber gave no signs of fright or poor memory. He put a snap into his work that appealed to professionals and lay spectators. Marion nodded gayly to Cuddy. He smiled happily in reply. If she insisted on doing that sort of thing, he was glad she could do it so well.

And then it happened, so quickly that no one could interfere. Marion forgot her instructions. Coming up from behind and on the blind side of Robber, as in the old routine of the act, Marion cracked her whip, threw herself on a rug in the center of the ring, and

gave the signal for Robber to lie down over her. The elephant shied, then steadied himself.

In obedience to his cue, Robber swung around and with legs far apart started to shuffle gingerly to a position directly above Marion's prostrate form. Then, at the moment when he should have gently lowered his body over hers, he dropped to his fore knees, plunged his tusks into her, wrapped his trunk around her body and threw her from him. With that terrifying speed which a mad elephant can exhibit, he dashed after his prey and plunged his tusks again into Marion's body as it lay in a little hollow outside the ring curb.

Circusmen act involuntarily in moments of crisis. Weed's two helpers hooked Baldy and King and pulled them toward the menagerie, while Weed leaped toward Robber and hooked that infuriated beast as deep as the steel point of his bull hook would go. Jules Turner, clown by profession and hero through opportunity, seizing a torch used in the lion act, lighted it as he ran toward Robber and thrust it into the elephant's mouth. Robber arose from his victim and charged at Turner and Weed who fled into the menagerie, where the fleeing men dashed between Baldy and King. Those elephants, in obedience to commands, closed in on Robber as he followed the clown and trainer. Then good elephants and animal trainers fought it out with the elephant that had gone bad, and finally beat him into submission.

Leaping from the audience which had become a horror-stricken mob, Cuddy lifted Marion in his arms and

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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carried her to the pad room. She had fainted. Blood flowed from her side, her arms. Frantically Cuddy called for the circus physician as he laid her on some blankets in the pad room. Montrose Manson and others of the male performers battled to keep the morbid mob at bay. Jenny Adams, the wardrobe woman, bent over Marion in a first effort to stop the flow of blood. Dr. Richards, the circus physician, arrived and took charge of the case. Ganwell's band, in the circus tent, pounded away at a stirring march. Cuddy, dazedly looking down at the broken body, felt some one touch him on the shoulder. It was Manson. "Shall we go on with the performance?" Manson asked.

Cuddy continued to gaze mutely at Marion. The girl opened her eyes. She tried to speak. Cuddy bent down until his ears were close to Marion's lips. "Go on with the show," she whispered. Cuddy nodded to Manson. Custom must be honored with custom. His whole being rebelled at the show that must go on. He heard Lou Riley, true to circus traditions, announcing from the ring curb: "Ladies and gentlemen: You will be glad to know that Miss Marion Fortescue has suffered only slight injuries and that the elephants are now quieted. There is positively no danger to any one. Please keep your seats. The performance will proceed."

In the pad room Cuddy asked: "What's the verdict, Dr. Richards?"

"I've done what I can do here. An ambulance has

been sent for. She must be taken to the hospital at once," the physician answered.

"Whether she gets well or not, you'll settle with me for this!" It was Manson, his white teeth set hard in a gray face.

Cuddy sat rigidly on a chair in the hall outside the operating room two hours after the lamming of Robber, the bad bull. In being there at that time he broke a fixed rule of the hospital but he had convinced the attendants that he would break that rule or some of their heads. As Cuddy the showman he was more addicted to direct action than as Cuddy the collegian. He clung to his chair in the hallway because Marion Fortescue was on the operating table. No matter how bad the news which would come from that operating room, he, Clarence Cuddington Cotter, must be the first to hear about it. He, above all others, was responsible for the crippling of the girl who lay within.

He could not forget the wickedness of Robber's little pig eyes. The good eye, the left eye, was toward Cuddy as Robber lunged the second time at Marion. Cuddy knew now the full meaning of "seeing red."

He dared not think of the consequences of his weakness in permitting Marion to go into the ring with an outlaw elephant. Marion had probably paid the penalty for his weakness and her daring. The responsibility was wholly his. He could have prevented the affair. He wondered whom he must notify in case of Marion's death—who meant the most to her—the circus people or the New Yorkers, the Conderbilts.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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She was very young, very pretty and very full of the love of life to leave it all. And he was to blame. Cuddy condemned himself in dry-eyed grief.

A door opened. Dr. Richards appeared. Cuddy pounced on him. "Tell me," he demanded. "Tell me."

Dr. Richards took him into an adjoining room. "Steady yourself, my boy," the physician said to his employer.

"For the love of God, out with it," Cuddy commanded.

"It's not as bad as we thought," Dr. Richards said. "It is a miracle that she was not killed. All that saved her was the fact that Robber had but one good tusk, which missed her the first time and when he lunged at her the second time she was protected, a little, by the ditch in which she lay."

"She will live, Dr. Richards?"

"We think so."

"When can I see her?"

"Perhaps to-morrow."

"Thank God for that!" said Cuddy fervently.

But Cuddy did not see Marion for two days. On the first day he left the show at Manchester and motored to the hospital at Nashua only to get a message from the sick room.

"Miss Fortescue is too ill to be seen by any one to-day. She says you must stay with the show." Dr. Richards delivered the message.

"Is she showing any improvement?" Cuddy asked with anguish in his voice.

"A little."

"You stay on this case until I tell you to come away," was Cuddy's order to his physician, "and see that the flowers I send each day reach her room. You'll have plenty of money to cover all expenses. I'll be back tomorrow, with Jenny Adams, who will remain."

At four o'clock the following afternoon Cuddy was at the hospital door.

"How did you get here from Concord?" Dr. Richards inquired.

"I came down by motor. It's only thirty miles," Cuddy answered. "Now may I see her?"

"For five minutes," Dr. Richards announced.

Although he was prepared by what Dr. Richards had told him, Cuddy almost lost his courage when he recognized in the pale, drawn face on the pillow the once rosy chubbiness of Marion Fortescue. He knew it was she by her hair of Tuscan gold and by her deep-blue eyes like the blue of the Mexican Gulf. But she seemed a broken thing indeed as she lay in her bandages and in her pain. Jenny began to cry. Cuddy turned away to choke his own tears back.

"Please don't do that, Jenny." It was Marion's voice, very faint, but Marion's.

"Miss Fortescue, I'd give anything in the world if I were there instead of you." It was Cuddy. He never could express himself in moments of deep emotion.

"I'm going to be all right," Marion replied. "I'm

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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not done for by any means. Robber tore my side. That's why I'm not allowed to talk, except for these few minutes. He broke my right shoulder and right wrist and, the doctor says, three ribs. Rather enough, I suppose. But he didn't kill me."

"You suffer terribly?" This from Cuddy.

"Tell them on the show that I'll be back in the ring in a month." Marion's voice was almost a whisper, but there was no question about her determination.

"They've sent you this," said Cuddy. He stepped into the hall and returned with an enormous floral piece. Cuddy had conveyed it from Concord with difficulty. It was a horseshoe four feet wide.

Marion smiled with tears in her eyes. Cuddy grinned in response. He understood Marion better every day. She had many saving graces—one of them was a sense of humor. She, whose bodily injuries tortured her without ceasing, could appreciate quantity production even in a concrete expression of sympathy.

"It's to bring you good luck," he said.

"It's good luck that brings you," she replied.

"Time to go now," Dr. Richards interjected.

"I'll be back to-morrow," said Cuddy.

"My love to the folks on the show," whispered Marion.

Cuddy reached the hospital on the following day determined to learn something more of Marion Fortescue's past and future. He was particularly interested in her past. The future, he felt, would take care of itself. His interest in her past was intensified by a

letter from his Uncle Ned. Writing from his office in New York, that legal light referred to two telegrams Cuddy had sent him in response to Uncle Ned's inquiries as to the identity of Miss Marion Fortescue:

"Your two wires duly received [wrote Uncle Ned]. The first one described Miss Marion Fortescue as the eighth wonder of the world. The second said she was a performer with Calkins' Circus and also a Conderbilt of New York.

"My first inquiry as to Miss Fortescue was prompted by a long distance phone message from her following which I got in touch with some legal friends in Dawsville, Virginia, who started some local wheels in motion, the result being that one Frazier, an attaché of your show, was placed in jail at Dawsville. I understood from Miss Fortescue that you desired to have this Frazier person arrested and that the case was urgent. I seldom act without full consideration and deliberation, but Miss Fortescue, who seemed to know a good deal about me and my friends in Dawsville, persuaded me. After I had acted, it struck me that Miss Fortescue, whoever she was, must be an unusual person. Hence my inquiry.

"Of course your first answer that she was the eighth wonder of the world was wholly unenlightening. Your second, that she was a circus performer and a Conderbilt, gave me something to work on. Your second statement seems to be correct. She is a performer with your circus, and is related to two very prominent circus families, the Tickneys and the Rawtons. But on her mother's side she is also related to the Conderbilts. Through that relationship she could, if she cared to press the claim, participate rather profitably in the division of one of the family estates. Will give you details if you wish. Although I never saw Miss Fortescue, she interests me.



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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"Sorry I have not been able to visit you or your circus. As no news is good news I assume you are making good.

"Miss Marjorie Dawson Trent has sent some letters to you through me, although I have given no one your address or your occupation. Miss Trent is a very nice girl and I hope you appreciate her. Personally I feel that the secrecy with which you surround yourself is ill advised. Inclosed find a letter from Marjorie.

"Sincerely,

"NATHANIEL COTTER."

"So hard-mouthed old Uncle Ned is something of a detective," Cuddy confessed "At least, he's dug up some real dope on Marion Fortescue. But what I want is something about her from herself."

Marjorie's message gave Cuddy almost as much of a shock as Marion's injury, for it said:

"DEAREST CUDDY:

"Life grows stranger as we grow older. I have always known when you have been near me. I knew you were near me on circus day. I could not tell how—but I knew. And ever since that day the rumor will not down in college circles that you have become a circus clown! It is impossible, but I must believe it. I must believe you clowned before me, here at Columbus College! Yes, I know, the idea is preposterous. But not I alone believe it. Many others in college do. Several of the boys and girls are certain they recognized you through your disguise. What an absurd fancy! And how well I know it is founded in fact. For I sensed you all that day—in the last place in the world you could be expected.

"And is it for that you have been hiding, you silly, eccentric boy! Is it for that I have been mourning you?

Is it for that I have been seeking you through your Uncle Ned, through Slats Murphy, through every possible channel?

"Be sure your love will find you out. I have no idea why you have chosen so weird an occupation. But you will explain all to me—and soon—because I shall bring you to me. It is not seemly that maiden follow man, but we shall meet, be sure of that. And when we meet I shall cure your strange, strange malady. For to me there is but one. His name is Cuddy.

"Lovingly,  
"MARJORIE."

So Marjorie loved him still! Did he love her?

That picture of her through the college window was as vivid as when he, in hiding, hungered at her beauty, lingered on her every word, thrilled when her face lighted up at prospect of word of him, through Slats. Yes, her heart was true to him and his was true to her. And fate was leading him—whither?

"It must be as it must be," he decided. "I'll keep this letter, Marjorie mine, until we meet again. But until then—"

Cuddy entered Marion's room behind a mass of flowers. "These are my selection," he remarked. "They may not be quite as impressive as the floral horseshoe, but my heart goes with them."

Marion's uncrippled hand lay on the bedspread. Cuddy bent over it and kissed it.

"That is a very sweet thing to do, Mr. Cotter," she whispered.

"I am thy humble knight, O Lady Fair," he answered. "Behold me on my knees before thee."

"And what is thy name, Sir Knight?" she responded.

"Sir Clancelot Cotter, if it please you, Fair Lady," he answered, "but my fellow knights have dubbed me Cuddy."

"Arise, Sir Cuddy, and give me news. What message bring you from the world without?" the girl replied.

"Strange rumors reach me from a monster, Ned. He is a veritable Merlin for weird witchcraft and strange learning. He has it that my Maid Marion is of royal blood."

Marion raised her one good hand. "Jenny," she said, "don't you want to take your afternoon walk? You've been indoors all day, dear." Jenny Adams, ancient wardrobe mistress with Calkins' Circus and lady in waiting to the stricken Marion Fortescue, discreetly vanished.

"You may proceed, Sir Knight," Marion directed.

"This monster, Ned, from his cavern in dim John Street, sends message that you are, in faith, of the blood of noble Rawtons and Tickneys whose brave men and fair women have graced many a tented tournament in this sweet land. But he also bestows upon me still stranger tidings. You are, he says, of the royal family of Conderbilt and hence destined to generous wordly fortune. Prithee, is it so?"

Maid Marion looked sadly upon Sir Cuddy.

"I feared that tale might descend upon us," she whispered.

"I would that my lady spoke more plainly," he said.

"There are but four, not of the house of Conderbilt, who know that I am of that house," she answered. "Save myself there was but one, the knave, Hal Hawkins. He has forfeited his pledge, and brought the tale to you. And now the monster, Ned, he has the tale also."

"But if you are of the house of Conderbilt, what ill betides, Fair Lady?"

"I will have naught of them," the girl replied. "I live my gypsy life. It is my pleasure. Gypsy blood is in my veins."

"But, my Lady Fair! You do throw away great riches, great castles, much luxury, stables filled with noble steeds, beauteous balls in gorgeous costumes, much feasting in your ancestral halls!" protested Cuddy.

"You have had all that, Sir Cuddy?"

"Indeed, much of it, my Lady Fair."

"Then why do you linger in our gypsy camp?"

"And why do you, my Lady Fair?"

"For reason such as keeps you there."

"And you will be well again, for that same reason?"

"I shall be of the world and whole again ere comes another moon," affirmed the wounded one.

Sir Clancelot Cuddy, on bended knee, kissed once more the hand of his Maid Marion.

"To-day I flew to you from yon Portsmouth. I



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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now return to that great city and my cavalcade," he said. "When morrow comes I come to you from Dover through heavens as blue as your blue eyes. On the day that follows I fly to you from Burlington, from a distant land known as Vermont. And then, I lead my company into a country far, called Canada, thence into a much farther country yclept Michigan. And there, Fair Lady, I shall await you."

"My brave and gallant knight, arise," she commanded. "And I beg you not to grieve o'er my slight wounds. For in one month from this good day I shall, in truth, be with you."

And Maid Marion kept her tryst with her Sir Clancelot Cuddy—and met another lady.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CUDDY IS UNMASKED

**G**UV'NER CLARENCE CUDDINGTON COTTER, sole owner and manager of Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair, led his gaudy parade down the main street of Teroshey, Michigan, late in that glorious summer.

Red was his feathered hat, red his satin cloak, red his baggy trousers, red his leathern boots. As he sat upon his great, gray steed, his good left arm held erect a staff from whose tip fluttered the escutcheoned banner of the Calkins cavalcade—a lion rampant upon a field of gold. His right hand rested lightly on his horse's neck. From beneath his feathered hat fell the long dark curls of a cavalier. Upon his upper lip bloomed two long, romantic, though false, mustaches. His skin was tanned by wind and weather.

"Some disguise," ruminated the costumed rider. "No one in the world would spot me for Cuddy, the campus favorite of Columbus College. Some class to this make-up. I sure am a regular showman now—and nothing else. Gone are the good old college days."

Whereupon fate, in proof that to err is human, brought Cuddy's horse into contact with a pretty young

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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lady at the exact center of the crossing of Teroshey's main streets. The pretty young lady emitted a lady-like yip. Cuddy threw his horse upon its haunches.

"I'm so sorry I frightened you. Very clumsy of me not to see you," said Cuddy, lifting his feathered hat with a flourish as became the cavalier.

The pretty young lady raised her eyes to Cuddy's. There was a start of mutual recognition, followed by a blush on the cheek of the maiden, a flush on the cheek of the man. For the first time since he left college for the circus, Cuddy Cotter was looking into the eyes of his sometime college sweetheart, Marjorie Dawson Trent.

Marjorie stopped, Cuddy stopped. The circus parade stopped. Cuddy's heart stopped, and, as far as he was concerned, the whole universe stopped while he fought against a flood of memories. He leaned over his saddle.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"We have a cottage here for the summer," she answered.

"I've got to see you again, Marjorie. Tell me where you live. Quick."

She gave him an address, with an amazed, "It's true, then, it's true!"

Bill Rhodes, the boss hostler, came pounding up.

"What's the matter, Guv'ner? Ain't your parade license all right?" the boss hostler anxiously asked his chief.

Cuddy came out of it with a jerk.

## *CUDDY IS UNMASKED*

---

"Sure, it's all right, Bill. Signal them to come ahead. Just had a little trouble with my saddle," Cuddy said.

Marjorie passed to the other side of the street and was lost in the throng on the sidewalk. The band burst into a brassy melody. The parade proceeded on its gayly caparisoned way, Cuddy at its head.

Of the thousand spectators who saw the incident, only one recognized its significance. That one was Marion Fortescue, billed as "Queen of the Arena." She guided a parade team of tandem whites between Cuddy's horse and the first band wagon. Marion didn't miss a thing. Not where Cuddy was concerned.

"I've got to square myself with Marjorie," thought Cuddy as the parade wound its way through the residential section of the summer resort to the pine-surrounded circus lot. "Four months is a long time without a word from me to her. Now that she knows where and what I am I've got to tell her why I left her as I did. I owe it to both of us. She'll understand."

Cuddy turned his parade horse over to his groom and made for the ticket wagon. It was closed. He tried his key. It would not work. He rattled the door.

"Who is it?" demanded Rony Gavin from within.

"It's Cotter," Cuddy answered. Rony opened the door.

"Come in and get a surprise party," he said. Cuddy found Calkins crouching in a corner.

"I caught this bird trying to frame something with



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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the train crew," Rony explained. "Don't know what it was, but I wouldn't put a train wreck beyond him. So I stuck my automatic in his ribs and here we are. Now what?"

"I just came back to see the old show," Calkins protested.

"I've been hoping you would," said Cuddy. "I want you to sign this affidavit that you gave Sol Goldman a fraudulent bill of sale, after the original, to my father, came legally into my possession."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," Calkins snarled.

"You will," Cuddy answered, "because here is the original which I took from Goldman in Piqua weeks ago. My Piqua lawyer will get Goldman out of the Piqua jail when you sign this and he signs one like it. Until then you'll both be locked up. I'm in-and-in with the commercial clubs and vigilance committees of this country and neither they, their people, nor I will stand for any frame-up from any grifters. What do you say, Calkins?"

"I'm on," the showman answered. "Lead me to your judge or whoever witnesses this thing."

When the ceremony had been concluded, and all preparations thus completed to correct the record and protect Cuddy as owner of Calkins' Circus, Cuddy said: "Don't let me see you anywhere around this show, Calkins."

"No chance. No chance. I'm done with the circus business," Calkins answered hotly. "Me for some business where a fellow can make an honest dollar."

## *CUDDY IS UNMASKED*

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"What have you in mind?" Cuddy inquired.

"Got a chance to run a hand book in Chicago," Calkins answered.

"Right in your line," said Cuddy, and saw Calkins no more.

Bings Balter, circus press agent, reported to Cuddy:

"There'll be two hundred of those orphans at the afternoon show. They were tickled stiff because we routed the parade past the orphanage. I'm allowing only twenty attendants this time. Last season when we showed this town we passed in two hundred orphans and two hundred attendants."

"You handle them on the front door, Balter. Charge all the peanuts they want to the show. Get that, Rony? Bring the peanut bill to me after the kids are filled up. I'll O.K. it. And, Balter, see that those orphaned kids have reserved seats whether we sell out or not. Put the crippled ones in the front row. And, Balter, will you please tell that new man in charge of reserved seats, to hold out four for me in the center section. I may have a party this afternoon. And, Rony, if anybody asks for me I'll not be on the lot until the afternoon opening. Have some business downtown." Cuddy started for Main Street.

"Miss Fortescue just asked for you, Guv'nor. Said she'd be in the dressing room."

Cuddy was expecting that message. He had not spoken to Marion since Marjorie and he stopped the parade. But he had not avoided Marion. There was no opportunity to speak to her on parade and every one

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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is busy when the parade reaches the circus lot. He knew exactly what he wanted to say to Marion.

She was sitting on a wardrobe trunk wearing the neat white costume she always wore when she took the white tandem team on parade. Her white-plumed hat rested on the trunk beside her. Her hair of Tuscan gold curled as it always curled in fair or stormy weather. In one gauntleted hand she held a long-lashed whip with which she flecked a dogcart at the other side of the pad room. Roger, her favorite airedale, lay at her feet.

"You saw the girl I nearly rode over downtown this morning?" Cuddy began.

She nodded.

"That's a very dear old friend of mine. I owe her a great, a humble, apology. Not for this morning, but for something far more serious. Something that has to do with college days."

"She — is — a — very — dear — old — friend — of — yours?"

Cuddy knew that when Marion drawled she had much upon her mind.

"Very," he said.

"She is very pretty."

"Yes."

"You knew her before you came on the show?"

"Yes."

"You have not seen her since?"

"Only from what you might call a distance."

"Nor heard from her?"

"Two or three times."

"Has she heard from you?"

"No, Marion. Not since I came on the show."

"I should like to meet her."

"You shall, this afternoon, if I can get her on the lot."

"Will you mention me—when you see her?"

"Yes. Of course."

"She will come."

Cuddy hastened to the street, leaped into a taxi and sped toward Marjorie's address.

Marjorie was waiting for him. "I knew you would come back to me," she whispered.

Marjorie's father, mother and Cousin Caroline were cool. So was the cottage which was restful and quiet after the heat, noise and dust of the teeming circus lot. The luncheon served on delicate china and linen was not so ample as Calkins' Circus cookhouse afforded, "but it's a darned sight more dainty," thought Cuddy. It was the first time he had dined "off the lot" for weeks.

"This is much more than I deserve," said Cuddy. "At least, it must seem much more to you. You were surprised, Marjorie, when you recognized me—in that circus costume?"

"It was a terrible shock," Marjorie replied. "How can you do it? First you are clown, then cavalier. And still you are Cuddy."

Cuddy concentrated on his salad. "I was a fool to



leave the circus lot," he thought. "And yet I know she loves me—and I her."

"The world swallowed you after your letter to me last spring," Marjorie resumed. "No one could find a trace of you. Your Uncle Ned would say nothing, save that he would try to have my letters reach you. The letters did not come back but no word came from you. There were many rumors about college. Some reflected on you, some on me. It was very difficult—to keep faith in you."

"You and your family felt that my conduct—the manner of leaving you and college—was not, well, quite honorable?" Cuddy was coming to his own defense.

"I'm afraid so," she answered. "And then you clowned before me!"

"You said you were suddenly without funds, but that was hardly sufficient excuse for an absolute disappearance," said Mr. Trent with church-warden dignity. "And your—reappearance," he added.

"And when a boy hides from all his friends, in and out of college, his friends sometimes find difficulty in defending him," interposed Mrs. Trent, "especially when he returns—in this fashion."

"I don't want to be rude to a guest in our house, but we felt you were not quite fair to us," said Cousin Caroline. "We all thought so very much of you," she added.

Cuddy winced. Could he make his Marjorie understand? He must.

"When the silver spoon from which I had always

## *CUDDY IS UNMASKED*

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eaten was suddenly whisked from my mouth, I had to drop out of my old life," he expostulated. "I couldn't go on, the way I had, without money."

"Money isn't always everything," asserted Marjorie.

"That is easily said by one who has always had all the money she wanted."

"Cuddy!"

"Neither you, Mr. Trent, nor you, Mrs. Trent, nor you, Cousin Carrie, would have been willing to have Marjorie marry a penniless man." Cuddy's back was to the wall. He began to warm up.

"But you might have told us where you were," said Marjorie.

"Not until I made good. You would not have understood," said Cuddy doggedly. "I'll tell you everything now." He hastily outlined his life from the day of his majority when he inherited a circus—and nothing else—a circus that had absorbed all his father's fortune. He hinted at the months of battling with a grifting circus gang, muddy show grounds, train wrecks, run-aways, wild animals, storms, and continued hostility of man and the elements. They listened patiently, politely. "And so I finally got rid of Calkins, Goldman and the grifters," he added with pride.

"I want you all to come to the show as my guests this afternoon," said Cuddy in conclusion. There was a marked pause. Cuddy felt that he hadn't put it over.

"We really are not very much interested in circuses,"

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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said Mr. Trent, "and I am matched in a golf tournament this afternoon."

"I haven't played golf since April," sighed Cuddy.

"Carrie and I are to be entertained on the Fairbanks' yacht at four," said Mrs. Trent.

"Suppose some of my old Chicago chums will be there," thought Cuddy.

"I've an engagement for tennis at three," said Miss Marjorie Dawson Trent, looking wistfully at her Cuddy.

Cuddy hungered to try his good right wrist on a tennis court.

He knew he was as much out of that picture in the cool summer cottage of the Trents as he had been out of the picture the day he entered the circus world. But he was determined to justify himself with Marjorie. He had to. There was too much between them.

"Please come out and see my circus, Marjorie?"

"I saw your circus once. All circuses look alike to me. They tire me," she replied.

"They wouldn't if you saw the real inside of a circus once—mine, for instance. Of course we live our lives a long way apart," said Cuddy. "I know how you and your set look upon the circus business. I was once in that set, you know. And there's just one way for you to understand what I did last spring and what I have been doing since. You must come to the show—my show—with me this afternoon, Marjorie."

"I really can't do it," said Marjorie, glancing at her watch.

## *CUDDY IS UNMASKED*

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"There's a girl with the show I want you to meet. She's a most remarkable girl," insisted Cuddy.

"Who is she?"

"She rides the high-school horses and works the bulls. I beg your pardon, I mean she handles the elephants. She also works in the butterfly act and walks the wire. She's the somersault flier in the return act. She's the most finished performer in our dressing room."

"What is her name?"

"Miss Marion Fortescue."

"How quaint!" Marjorie was a bit bored. "Is she interesting?"

"I'm terribly fond of her," said Cuddy.

"I think I'll go to Cuddy's circus," declared Marjorie with sudden animation. "Cuddy, this is the final test of my love for you."

Cuddy had kept his taxi waiting. They reached the circus grounds in record time.

"And you really like this sort of thing, Cuddy dear?"

"Crazy about it."

Marjorie and Cuddy were on the circus lot with its dust, heat and jostling. In front of them a capacity crowd sought simultaneous entrance into the afternoon performance. Summer resorters, townspeople, families from the backwoods milled together at the doors.

To the right of Marjorie and her host the negro side-show band blared offensively. Doc Inman barked his enticing ballyhoo and slapped with his suggestive



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

stick the blatant banners picturing the pleasant freaks within the side-show tent.

Marjorie gazed with disgust at the garish portraits of the fat girl, the dwarfed man, the "Den of Hideous Reptiles," the "Tattooed Princess" and other features of Calkins' Museum of Monstrosities.

"You can't mean that you like this sort of thing, Cuddy!"

"You bet!"

"Not all of it," she insisted. "Not a boy reared as carefully as you. You liked the finer things of life, art, music, literature, when I knew you in college."

Cuddy hedged a little.

"I won't say I like all of the circus game," he admitted. "I don't like the side show at all, but I'm not big enough yet to get along without it. It's sort of a necessary evil. There's nothing immoral about it, you know. It's just a sad commentary on human nature that people want to pay for seeing any kind of a freak. They have, since history began, and they will when the world is on the border of the millennium."

He guided her skillfully through the throng. Rony Gavin, selling tickets with both hands, nodded and smiled as Guv'ner Cotter and his lady fair passed the ticket wagon. Rony, who saw all things, saw more than an ordinary "courtesy to the press" in Cuddy's attitude toward Miss Marjorie Dawson Trent though he knew not her name or whence she came.

"See anything familiar about this circus?" he asked.

## *CUDDY IS UNMASKED*

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"Looks just like it did at Columbus College," she answered.

"It'll look a lot different to you when you come to know it," he assured her.

Cuddy unhooked a chain across the private entrance at the side of the marquee and guided Marjorie into the menagerie.

"Heavens, Cuddy! Can't you get a little air into this tent?" she exclaimed with kerchief to nose. Cuddy was chagrined.

"That's what I thought the first time I came in here," he admitted. "It's a combination of lions, tigers and other cat animals, the monks, seals, elephants and all that, to say nothing of our illustrious patrons. But I've grown so used to it that I don't notice it, even on a hot day like this. Won't you say hello to my old pal, Hank, the monk?"

A tiny ring-tailed monkey clung to his cage bars and chattered to Cuddy.

"You certainly have changed since you took me to the Junior 'Prom,' " said Marjorie.

"Guess I have," said Cuddy to her. Then to himself, "But I'm not a tea hound any more."

From within the main tent came the call of a bugle.

"That's the signal for the grand entrée. The show's about to begin. Let's hurry," urged the circus magnate. She paused with reluctant feet where the menagerie and the big top meet.

"Oh, come on, Marjorie," pleaded Cuddy. "You must see Marion. She rides the rear horse of the

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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white tandem at the very beginning of the grand entrée. You saw her at Columbus College but you'll really know her now. I owe very much to her."

Marjorie kept pace with Cuddy as he trudged along the sawdust-sprinkled hippodrome track to the seats awaiting them.

"There she comes!" he exclaimed. "I'm what they call a seasoned trouper now, but I always get a thrill out of the 'opening spectacle.' Don't you feel it?"

"Which is Marion Fortescue?" was Marjorie's response.

"That one coming around the end, just back of the band. See that white tandem team! She's riding the rear horse. See her! In the white habit. The one with the curly hair. The hair of Tuscan gold!"

"Cuddy," demanded Marjorie, with her eyes fixed on the approaching equestrienne, "who helped you evolve that Tuscan gold idea? I never heard you use just those words, but they do remind me of last spring on the college campus."

Cuddy's brown cheeks turned to red.

"It is a Tuscan gold," he insisted, "and I thought of it myself."

"I should never have thought of it—in this case," remarked Cuddy's sometime college sweetheart.

The densely packed "blue seats" and "reserves" rose with enthusiasm to the brilliancy of the opening spectacle as the procession passed around the hippodrome track. "The Queen of Sheba," the circus posters called the spectacle. The queen had been played by Marion

## *CUDDY IS UNMASKED*

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when Cuddy first saw the show. Marion had been dressed for the part in Oriental fashion and was borne on a litter by four willing slaves, from the crew of colored canvasmen. Shortly after Cuddy became actual instead of theoretical possessor of his circus, he affected a change in the cast. He didn't fancy Marion in that particular queenly rôle. "It's too e—er—exotic," he explained to her.

Now his Queen of the Arena passed him on her milk-white steed without a glance in his direction. She knew how to hold her head high and her eyes front, did Marion Fortescue. If she saw Cuddy and Marjorie seated side by side in the reserved-seat section, she gave no sign. Cuddy felt a tightening in his throat. In all their months on the lot together, Marion had never failed to smile as she passed him.

Marion and the new Queen of Sheba and her motley escort disappeared through the red curtains of the dressing-room entrance. The comedy mules and their hardy but unsuccessful riders competed for the plaudits of the multitude. They retired amid riotous laughter and were succeeded in rings and on stage by the skillfully equipoised Japs, whose feats of balancing and juggling were rewarded by enthusiastic applause. The show was going well.



## CHAPTER XIX

### MARJORIE MEETS MARION

“**W**ILL you come into the dressing room and meet Marion?”

Marjorie jumped. She had been dreaming. Dreaming of the days with Cuddy in college classrooms. The evenings with Cuddy making fudge in the co-eds' dormitory. Of other evenings with Cuddy when their canoe floated on the moonlit lake and he sang to the strumming of her guitar. Of still other evenings when they danced as only they of all the college couples could dance. She was ages from the noise, the crowd and the excitement of a circus tent until Cuddy said:

“Will you come into the dressing room and meet Marion?”

Still walking as if in sleep, she suffered herself to be paraded around the hippodrome track with Cuddy at her elbow. She was vaguely conscious of exchanging greetings with friends who saluted her with amused grins and comments from the tiers of encircling seats. Of course that meant nothing. Any one was apt to cut tennis for a circus. And none of her crowd in the summer resort knew of her college affair with her present guide, philosopher and friend. She realized

## MARJORIE MEETS MARION

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that Cuddy was trembling as the attendants pulled aside the curtains and the one-time college boy and his one-time college girl entered that realm of paint and spangles so intriguing to the average person—the circus dressing tent.

“Miss Marion Fortescue is wanted.”

Jenny Adams, wardrobe mistress, at word from Guv’ner Cotter, thus paged the circus performer after poking a head inside a canvas flap marked “Ladies’ Dressing Room,” while they waited in the pad room.

Miss Marion Fortescue promptly appeared. She had made a quick change from riding habit to ballet costume of light blue. In her hand was a bright blue parasol. On her feet high-heeled, wooden-soled pumps. Her hair of Tuscan gold was done high on her head and held there with a great golden comb. Her arms and shoulders were bare. There was nothing wrong with her color or her lines. Marion was well aware of that.

“Marion, this is my dear friend, Marjorie Trent, of whom I spoke this morning,” said Cuddy.

“I’m awfully glad to meet you. Cuddy has told me so much about you,” said Marjorie Dawson Trent.

“I’m very glad to meet you. Cuddy said you were such good friends,” replied Marion Fortescue.

Across a yawning social chasm the two pretty girls shook hands.

There was a pause for mutual mental reservation.

“I’m so sorry Cuddy nearly ran over you on parade this morning,” said Marion Fortescue.

“I should never have recognized him otherwise,” re-

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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plied Marjorie Trent, "although I know him—very—well."

Miss Fortescue appraised Miss Trent. The latter made a refreshing picture in her white sport skirt, pink silk sweater, nicely tilted tam and snappy hose and shoes. Marjorie was dark. Much darker than Cuddy and almost as tall. About the same age, too, and just about as clean cut. Marion had to look up to Marjorie, physically, but she looked up to her in no other way. The only person Marion looked up to as really above her was the person called Cuddy.

"How many minutes before you go on, Marion?" asked Cuddy.

Marion cocked an ear toward the untiring band.

"Eight minutes," she answered.

"We have no call boy in a circus dressing room," Cuddy explained to Marjorie. "The band plays the same musical program for each performance. The performers in the dressing room can always tell by the band music when they will be due in the ring."

"And when the equestrian director's whistle blows for our act we have to be there," Marion volunteered.

"No one is late around this show," said Cuddy proudly. "Or if they are, I slap a fine on them."

Performers, human and otherwise, came and went. A clown with his trained pigs, fresh from their artistic triumphs in the arena of the main tent, grunted through the passageway.

"Pretty hot under the big top to-day, Jules," said Marion.

## MARJORIE MEETS MARION

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"You'll think so before you're on the wire three minutes," the clown answered, the sweat rolling down his whitened cheeks.

The balancing Japs trooped by, the women performers entering their side of the dressing room, the men theirs.

"Would you like to see how we circus women manage it?" suggested Marion.

"Indeed I would," Marjorie answered.

"I'll be back in just a minute," said Cuddy. "Have to speak to Ganwell about that dance he's playing for your wire act."

Marion raised the canvas flap of the tent marked "Ladies' Dressing Room," and held it back that Marjorie might enter.

"We don't have much room to spare," explained Marion, as Marjorie found herself inside a canvas-walled space, perhaps sixty by thirty feet, where women in various stages of deshabille stood before square, opened trunks that lined the walls and ran in a double aisle down the middle of the tent.

It was a colorful picture that Marjorie's eyes met, red silken tights, billowy skirts of the wire walkers, bare, white bodies, stockings of varied hues hung on the wire lines ready for instant service. Around the wall, street costumes were festooned over wire lines. Marjorie noted one particularly modish brown crêpe de chine hanging beside Marion's space.

"Most of our street clothes are kept in the cars," Marion said, as if reading Marjorie's thoughts. "But



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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of course we have to have something to go about in when we leave the lot."

Marjorie felt her usual self-assurance deserting her as she gazed around the tent, and met the eyes of the women who paused in their dressing as she entered. It was not that she felt them hostile, or even unfriendly, these women of the circus, but somehow she felt like a shipwrecked mariner on an island where none spoke her language.

A girl of nineteen or twenty squatted on an upturned pail and darned a rent in a pair of yellow tights. Marjorie recognized her as one of the trapeze performers. Two others near by chattered in French as they fluffed their bobbed hair and powdered shiny noses. Marion was placing shoe trees in her white-kid riding boots. Over near the entrance Jules Turner's wife was nursing a fat-cheeked baby.

"We have to be quite good natured," laughed Marion. "Each of us has a space six feet square for our trunk and dressing stand. You see my mirror is in the top of my trunk. I hang my ring costumes on this wire stand just in front of the trunk until I want them. My make-up box is in that tray. We have to figure things pretty carefully."

"Rather—clubby," suggested Marjorie. She watched the rows of closely packed women in various degrees of undress. One muscular performer, stripped to her waist, wiped the make-up from her face, plunged her arms into a bucket of water and showered her head

## MARJORIE MEETS MARION

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and shoulders. Her breast was heaving. She struggled for breath.

"She's just come off the Roman rings," said Marion. "She works close to the top of the tent. Sometimes it's one hundred and ten degrees up there. I'll have a taste of it to-day in the flying act at the close of the show."

"Don't you ever quarrel in here?" Marjorie was noting the cheerfulness of the dressing room's occupants. The feminine circus performers—casually changing costume, sitting at ease waiting for their next turn in the ring or mending damaged wardrobe—seemed to be in excellent humor with each other.

"We have to get along together," said Marion simply. "We eat at the same table three times a day, sleep two in a berth, two berths high, in the same Pullman, each night, share this same dressing room each day, work in the same ring and ride the same parade, always together. That's part of the business. Only when the show runs into rain and everything is soaking wet for three days at a stretch, well—it's rather hard on the disposition."

"Pardon such a bromidic question, Miss Fortescue," said Marjorie, "but do you really like this life? It must be awfully—rough."

"Do you like yours?" was Marion's response. Then she hastened to add, "I don't mean to be rude. I've showed in many college towns in the spring and fall and I've seen the students going to their studies or playing on the college grounds, and I suppose you do

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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all enjoy it, don't you? Cuddy used to." There was a wistful note in her voice.

"Of course. We love it," Marjorie asserted. "And Cuddy—did."

"I love the circus business," promptly replied the Queen of the Arena. "I was brought up in it. Perhaps that's why I love it. And it's splendid training, don't you think, for the time when I shall have my own home?"

Marjorie started. "I beg your pardon! What did you say?" she asked.

There was an unusual commotion in the pad room. Two men dressed for the ring staggered through the canvas door carrying a woman in tights. The woman moaned. Tears ran down her face. One of the men kissed her as they laid her on the ground between two rows of trunks. Several of the women performers rushed to her. Marion reached her first. She felt of the woman's arms and legs, of her back, her hands and feet. The injured woman continued to moan and weep. The two circus men withdrew. Marjorie remained near the canvas door. In a moment Marion rejoined her.

"That's Sally Fisher," Marion explained. "She missed her catch on a trapeze act. Took a twenty-foot fall. I told her the other day she was getting careless."

"Is she badly hurt?"

"Can't tell yet. We have a doctor on the show. He'll be here soon. I think no bones are broken. She

## *MARJORIE MEETS MARION*

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fell easy, limp, you know. She's an old performer. But she'll not work for a week or so."

"Do you mean to say she will perform again within two weeks!"

"Oh, yes. I've fallen twenty-five feet and worked two weeks after. You must fall loose and try to hit the ground on your shoulders or back. Just let yourself go. If you fall with your muscles tense you're bound to break something. And if you fall forward and light on your head, either in a net or on the ground, it's apt to snap your head back and break your neck."

The circus band changed from a gallop into a waltz movement.

"Excuse me. That's the music for my wire act. Will you wait just outside in the pad room for Cuddy? He'll take you back to the reserved seats. Am very glad to have met you." Marion clattered out in her wooden-soled mud pumps.

As Marjorie stepped into the canvas-walled lane between the men's and women's dressing rooms, Marion passed Cuddy at the red-curtained entrance to the main tent. Cuddy patted Marion's shoulder in passing.

"Sorry I am so late," said Cuddy as he approached Marjorie. "Had a little accident in Number One ring."

"Wasn't it distressing?" said Marjorie. "What a frightful life!"

"Pretty bad fall she had," admitted Cuddy. "A woman's such a highly nervous organism. A fall's apt to affect her work. Takes the heart out of her."



Marion is one of the few women performers who can take a fall without losing her nerve. But then, she's young. Only twenty."

Marjorie fancied that Cuddy said it with the pride of possession. She allowed herself to be led back to the reserved seats.

Miss Marion Fortescue, schooled in circus tent and sawdust, earned that afternoon her title of Queen of the Arena. Calkins, one-time owner of Cuddy's circus, had crowned her queen in jest. Marion took the title that afternoon in earnest. She took it in the exercise of the art she best knew—the art of the circus ring. She practiced that art with all the power within her because she meant to hold Cuddy against all comers. She recognized Marjorie Dawson Trent as her most dangerous rival. Marjorie had all the charm of one to the manner born. She was one of Cuddy's class—the class Marion had renounced. And Marjorie was undoubtedly fond of Cuddy. Marion feared that Cuddy was fond of Marjorie. Hence Marion made the fight of her life.

It would have been a poor clod who could not have thrilled to Marion's performance that afternoon. She danced like a sprite on the tiny tight wire. She made "Prince," her high-school horse, finish his fancy steps by walking on his hind legs half way around the arena. She floated to the top of the tent in her butterfly costume and pirouetted there like a Pavlowa of the air. Only once or twice in a lifetime does a circus per-

## MARJORIE MEETS MARION

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former receive the homage given her that afternoon. The great audience with upturned faces burst into salvos of applause at every pause in her performance. And throughout her dangerous feats Marion Fortescue kept her eye on Marjorie Dawson Trent, and upon Cuddy at Marjorie's side. What is threat to life and limb when an affair of the heart is involved?

Marjorie sat as one entranced until the elephant act was on. Then she shuddered.

"Cuddy, how can you permit a girl like that to risk her life with those horrid brutes?" she demanded. "You who were so tender."

"You don't know Marion," he answered. Marion ordered and whipped the monster pachyderms about as if they were trained dogs. She jabbed an elephant hook into the trunk of the biggest of them. He trumpeted in pain. She stretched her lithe figure upon the ground. The biggest elephant slowly sank upon the ground directly over her. She disappeared under the monster's bulk. The two other elephants sat up, back to back, upon the crouching "bull." There was a word of command in a girlish voice. The elephants got up on all fours. Marion jumped to her feet, ran to the ring bank and "took her bow." The crowd gave her an ovation. Marjorie shuddered again. Marion hooked the biggest elephant once more. One more he trumpeted, then stood on his hind legs, with Marion poised beneath his forelegs and his waving trunk.

"That one she works with the most, the biggest one,

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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is what is known as an 'outlaw bull,' 'Robber' we call him," Cuddy was enlightening Marjorie with the lore of the circus. "You notice he has the piggiest eyes of all of them. He nearly killed her last spring. That's why she hooks him so often. She's not afraid of him and lets him know it."

"And you still insist you love this life?" There was a suggestion of despair in Marjorie's voice.

"I love some things about it," said Cuddy. Marion mounted the head of the big bull, Robber, and balanced there as the elephant herd made its exit. Marjorie watched Cuddy's face with increasing wonder. She thought Cuddy had forgotten she was there. But in a moment he added:

"You'll understand me better when you see the flying return act. That will be on in a few minutes—and then we can go."

Marjorie put her hand on Cuddy's.

"Forgive me if I fail to share your enthusiasm for the life you say fate selected for you. You must admit, Cuddy, that it's a far cry from the life we lived in college days. I thought I might be reconciled to the reality of you as a circus man but I find it—very difficult. And I am so fond of you."

Cuddy turned to her.

"Marjorie," he said, "our college romance was a beautiful thing. I was terribly sorry it had to come to an end."

"Did it—have to?" she answered.

## MARJORIE MEETS MARION

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Cuddy gently disengaged his hand. It was not seemly that the sole owner and proprietor of Calkins' Classical Circus should be holding hands in the presence of his circus company and an audience of three thousand modernized Romans, even though the latter might be intent upon the circus performance. Marjorie and Cuddy sighed. Theirs had been a beautiful romance.

Another romance suddenly loomed before them. It was the romance that enwrapped Marion Fortescue.

During the afternoon's performance Marion had appeared in riding costumes, as a butterfly fluttering about the dome of the tent, as a ballet dancer flitting along an invisible wire, as a frocked and booted commander of clumsy but obedient elephants. Now her slender figure was before them, barenecked, barearmed, in pink bodice and pink tights. Marjorie gasped. Cuddy heard Marjorie's gasp and reddened. With her fellow trapezists Marion unconcernedly kissed her hands to the crowded seats.

"It is part of the business," said Cuddy lamely.

Marjorie offered no reply.

Marion climbed nimbly up the swaying rope ladder past the net to a slender perch which hung from a great iron frame work. The band slipped into a lilting waltz. Marion grasped her trapeze bar, sailed bird-like toward the center of the tent, somersaulted gracefully through space and seized the extended hands of the "catcher" who hung by his knees from the opposite



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

---

"cradle." It was a beautiful thing beautifully done. Marion kissed her hands to the applauding crowd before she turned on a narrow bit of board to seize her swaying trapeze bar and soar back to the safety of her original perch. That was but the beginning of the feature number of the circus performance, the return act of the Five Flying Fortescues.

"I named the team after Marion," said Cuddy. "Few performers work under their own names, and Marion is the star of the act."

Marjorie still made no reply.

Marion went through her aërial routine coolly and calmly, although the heat near the top of the tent was stifling and the strain was apparent in the faces of the audience and other performers. Always starting from her high perch and accomplishing her sensational feats in mid-air, she threw a complete forward somersault from her flying trapeze bar, was caught by a man hanging in the other end of the rigging, was suspended by his hands for a moment, then thrown back toward the returning trapeze bar, which she caught after completing a pirouette and a half. Far toward the canvas roof she vaulted clear over the trapeze bar, caught the hands of her partner, did a twisting shoot through them and again caught her own trapeze bar on its return toward her starting point. Then in the fifty feet between her trapeze and her catcher she did a straight somersault, a double cutaway and somersault back, a twisting cutaway and back somersault, and a somersault in which she passed another flyer as the latter

## MARJORIE MEETS MARION

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was somersaulting in the opposite direction. Finally, with band stilled and audience hushed, she completed a "two-and-a-half somersault" to her catcher, climbed to the very top of the rigging, threw herself into the air, turned over three times, struck the net fairly on her shoulders, bounded lightly to the ground—and captured the greatest honors of the day.

Only once did Marjorie take her eyes from Marion. That was when Marion did her triple somersault from rigging to net. Then Marjorie averted her gaze. She remembered what Marion had said in the dressing room about one way of acquiring a broken neck. When the Five Flying Fortescues departed via the dressing room curtains, Cuddy, who had in high enthusiasm interpreted the "flying act," as he called it, so that Marjorie might miss nothing of its fine technic, fired his leading question at Marjorie.

"What do you think of her?"

"Marion?"

"Yes. Who else?"

"Rather a daring girl."

"You mean her circus tights?"

"Partly."

"She can't help that. It's part of the business, same as a *première danseuse*. She's been doing just that thing for ten years."

"Does that make her more attractive to you?"

"That's not in the least like you." Cuddy was hurt. "Guess we better go now and get out before the crowd starts. Show closes after this riding act."

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Silently Marjorie accompanied Cuddy through the main tent and the menagerie. Cuddy tossed an order or two to Rony Gavin. Then the man and the maid of his college days stepped into a taxi and rode back into the world neither one had quite forgotten.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE GREAT DECISION

“C UDDY,” said Marjorie as they walked along a path overlooking Lake Michigan, “you asked me to go to your circus so that you might be understood by me. I’ve gone, but I don’t understand you—now. I thoroughly understood you in college. Since we parted last spring you have changed beyond my understanding. It breaks my heart.”

“You do not see in me any development of character, any increase in moral and physical strength?”

“You are bigger and browner. Yes. But you seem so far away.”

“My luncheon story of how I had to take charge of this circus to save the remnant of the family fortune and of the long battle I fought to run the grifters and other tough elements away and to make it a clean, ‘Sunday School show,’ all that did not impress you?”

“Not particularly. Your course was rather negative. And not wholly respectable. You would have been a greater credit to—me—and your other friends if you had gone into some legitimate business.”

“The circus business is just as legitimate as any



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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other, if it is conducted along legitimate lines. I have a 'Sunday School show' now and I'm going to keep it as a 'Sunday School show.' Other showmen have done it, why not I? You could learn to like it, Marjorie!"

"It is such a wretched sort of gypsy life for a boy like you."

"That's what I thought about it, at first," admitted Cuddy. "But during the months of fighting with myself and almost everything around me, through the wreckage of 'blow-downs,' the muck of wet lots, bad weather, long hours, short sleep, discomfort and disaster something happened to me that could not have happened in the soft old days. I'm less than six months older than when we danced together in the college 'gym'—according to the calendar—but I'm six years older in experience. And out of my experience has come a great love for this gypsy life, as you call it."

Marjorie listened patiently. Cuddy hesitated, then resumed:

"I suppose I'm influenced by the same nomadic instinct that caused the first Aryan migration; that brought our Puritan forefathers across the Atlantic; that carried our Scotch-Irish ancestors across the Appalachian Mountains. Unless you have lived such a life as I have lived since last spring, you cannot know the fascination of the daily arrival in a new town, the joy of setting up, of tearing down, or moving on to another town each night. I doubt if I ever lead any

## THE GREAT DECISION

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other life. But, Marjorie—I do not want to lead it alone.”

Marjorie leaned toward him. They had stopped on a sandy ridge overlooking the lake. The western sun shone brilliantly upon the brilliant beauty of Marjorie Dawson Trent. “And you have quite forgotten all that went before, between you and me?” she asked.

“The best cuddler on Columbus campus.” That had been Cuddy’s title in college. He drew in his breath sharply. He clenched his hands. He had but to say one word—the right word—take Marjorie in his arms—and back into fantasy would fade the world of the show tents and sawdust. Cuddy was human. He tried hard to say the one word. What he did say was:

“You ask me to chuck the show business?”

“If you want—me.” She leaned closer toward him, tears in her eyes.

He hesitated. He extended his arms, pleadingly.

“I—can’t—do—it—Marjorie. I must stick by my show.”

She turned on him, wrathfully, as becomes a woman scorned.

“It isn’t the circus business you love, it’s the circus girl.”

Cuddy was mute. He was terribly fond of Marjorie.

“You’ll tire of both, when it is too late. I know you, Cuddy. I know you better than any other person in the world knows you. And I—Cuddy, this is the day of your great decision. You’ve fallen far from your rightful estate but you can come back to where

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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you were, if you will. Your blood inheritance will bring you back to all of us some day."

"And until I do come back, as you put it, there can be nothing more between us?"

"Nothing, Cuddy, and you don't know how it hurts me to say that."

"That's putting it right up to me. That's hitting me hard."

"Yes, Cuddy. But it is hitting me much harder."

"I think a lot of you, Marjorie. A lot more than you realize."

"There's just one way in which you can prove it."

"I'm—g o i n g—to—have—to—stick—with—my—show," he slowly said. He felt as if he were reciting from his Domesday book.

Without another word they turned, each in his own direction; she toward her summer home and her tennis, golf, bridge and yachts; he toward his circus lot and its people who live apart.

Alone on the sand dunes, a girl cried "Oh, Cuddy! Cuddy!"

A boy dragged his feet as he went. Life seemed black night to him.

"Marjorie may have been right," he mused. "Blood will tell. My ancestry will assert itself some day, maybe too late. We've had some wonderful times together, Marjorie and I. Her father used to hint that I would make good in the brokerage business. I don't know. Wonder how his golf game is. Mine must be hopelessly off. And as for tennis—and danc-

## THE GREAT DECISION

---

ing, 'fraid I've quite forgotten how. They must have some peachy dancing parties up there in the summer colony. And Marjorie and I could dance!"

He trudged toward the circus lot, head down, eyes unseeing.

"If I should chuck this show business and go back to orthodox life—well—I'm only twenty-one. Yes, Marjorie may be right. I wasn't born into the show business like most of the people on the show were. That makes a lot of difference. The people like me on the show, but they've never admitted that I was one of them. Like seeks like. Wonder if the fellows will open the new fraternity house this fall? And will Slat's Murphy be waiting for Marjorie?"

Cuddy in his ruminating walk passed the railroad cars of Calkins' Classical Circus, Mammoth Menagerie, Museum of Monstrosities and Free Horse Fair. Trainmaster Galva Green was directing his razorbacks as they set up the runs preparatory to the evening's loading.

"Some class to those new seventy-foot steel flats, Guv'ner," was Green's greeting to his circus boss.

"They'll load more than the old sixty-foot wooden ones," commented Cuddy. "How do your men like them?"

"The old troupers are agin 'em," Green replied. "Don't like 'em because they ain't trussed. Think if they're overloaded they'll buckle—and then, good night."

"They'll stand up all right," said Cuddy. He con-



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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tinued his march toward his circus, his head a little higher.

"Guess it's up to me to get out of this circus business and back where I belong, in a bank or a bond house or something." Cuddy's mind was reacting to Marjorie's suggestions. He stepped aside as the cook-house wagon, first wagon off the lot, passed him.

"Must speak to the steward about the way he's packing that wagon," he said to himself. "That back door shouldn't be open. No wonder we're missing canned goods at each stand. That's the only fault to find with him. Otherwise he's a regular steward. Good as the one at our college club. And he was good!"

The stable wagon rumbled along behind the cook-house equipment.

"Getting off the lot in good time, and not a long haul from lot to train," thought Cuddy. "Wonder why Bill Rhodes doesn't have that pole team reshod. Must be some reason. Bill knows his business. There goes the side-show band, making the evening opening."

Cuddy quickened his pace. He was always on the lot for the openings. The calliope, its evensong now sung and its voice mute until the morrow, rolled off the lot as Cuddy hurried on.

"Looks like good business to-night. Nice crowd waiting for the ticket wagon to open." Cuddy's searching eyes mechanically checked off each pole, stake, rope, wagon, and showman in sight.

"McGinnis, it's time to lower those flags from the center poles," he snapped at his boss canvasman.

## *THE GREAT DECISION*

---

"You'll be tearing down the menagerie top in a few minutes." Having missed his supper, Cuddy paused at the butcher's outside stand and indulged in a smoking "Coney Island red hot" sandwich. "You're putting in the real meat and leaving out the chemical coloring stuff since I gave you the office, eh, son?"

"All the time, Guv'ner," the butcher boy replied.

Everything was running smoothly with the Calkins show.

Everything was not running so smoothly in Cuddy's mind.

He drifted back of the big top, found a seat on the pole of the canvas wagon and lighted a cigarette. Evening was a good time to think.

"Marjorie was certainly right," he admitted. "Might as well be honest with myself. I don't belong here. They're not my people. I've made good. Got my bill of sale back and recorded, so I really own the show. Got the show on its feet. That's more than the average successful business man could have done. Now it's up to me to sell out while the selling is good. Have no trouble doing that and showing a profit. Papers are saying a lot—thanks to Bings Balter's press work—about the wonderful success of the Calkins show. Good time to sell. Then back to the old life, to golf, tennis, dances and all the rest. Gee, but I'm homesick for the college crowd!"

Jules Turner, dean of clown alley, came panting into Cuddy's view. "Been looking all over the lot for you,

## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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Guv'ner," the old clown gasped. "Manson gave me this note for you half an hour ago."

Cuddy tore open the note.

"I told you I'd settle with you for that Robber business [it said]. You're no trouper and no man. You're a simp and you'll always be a simp. Marion and I have blowed the show. I broke her into the business and she belongs to me. When you get this we'll be on our way to gettin' married like we always expected to be."

Cuddy catapulted from the canvas wagon. He shook Turner until the old man's bones rattled.

"Which way did they go?" he demanded.

"Going west on the six forty-five to-night," chattered the clown.

Cuddy streaked across the circus lot and dashed into a taxi.

"Beat it for the railroad station," he ordered.

Taxi and train reached the station at the same time.

Manson had an advantage of thirty pounds. Cuddy the advantage of youth. Weight swung widely. Youth bored in. Passengers and crew left the train to cheer the combatants. When the knock-out came through a lucky uppercut, Cuddy called two brakemen.

"Put him in the day coach," he commanded, as the brakemen lifted Manson's unconscious form, "he's got a ticket for somewhere."

Turning to Marion, the only silent spectator, Cuddy quietly said: "Get in the taxi, please. We're going

## THE GREAT DECISION

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back to the lot." They exchanged no words on the return journey. They parted in the pad room.

"I'll be looking for you when I'm straightened out," he said. The girl made no reply.

A half hour later Cuddy raised the big top side wall and entered the main circus-tent. It was almost dark in there. Chandelier Whitey was preparing to hoist the gasoline lights to their proper places on the center poles. It would soon be time to open the front doors.

Marion Fortescue was sitting at the entrance to the reserved-seat section. She always sat there, Cuddy recalled, for an hour or so before the evening performance, always reading if it were light enough, or working on some ubiquitous embroidery. Marion believed in a quiet hour. It happened that a quiet hour was just what Cuddy was looking for, above all things a quiet hour with Marion Fortescue.

He found a seat beside her. He took her hands in his. Her needle ceased to shuttle and her fingers were at rest. It was the first time Cuddy had practiced the gentle art of hand-holding upon any member of his circus company.

"Marion," said Cuddy, "we've been through a lot of trouble together, you and I. If you hadn't stuck by me neither the show nor I could be classed as a going concern. I haven't much to offer you, except this circus. I can't boast of any family like yours because none of my people was ever in the show business. But I'm heels over head in love with you, dear. I didn't realize it until a little while ago. Now I know I've



## *CUDDY OF THE WHITE TOPS*

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been wild about you for a long time. And I'm kind of jumbly in my mind but I—if you will be willing to put up with my shortcomings, lack of family and all that—and if the show comes into winter quarters this fall ahead of the game, then—if you will have me—will you marry me?"

Miss Marion Fortescue, wire walker, animal trainer, somersault flier and high-school rider, leaned her golden head upon Clarence Cuddington Cotter's aristocratic shoulder and sighed in gorgeous content.

"Why wait until the end of the season?" she whispered.

Chandelier Whitey, veteran of many a blow-down and circus clem, a man of iron nerve and corded muscle, all but dropped a burning gasoline cluster from the top of the circus tent. It was Cuddy's warwhoop that did it. Cuddy was trying to express his accumulated sentiments. Cuddy's future held no terrors for him now. All his problems had been solved. Henceforth he would have nothing to do in life but make love to Marion Fortescue Cotter—and run a circus.

He seized his bride-to-be around her slender waist. He hugged her with bearlike strength before Chandelier Whitey could flood the tent with light.

"Sweetheart," he whispered in her shell-like ear. "Sweetheart! We'll be married in Charlevoix to-morrow! I always knew that Charlevoix would be a good town!"

"The towns will all be good to us," murmured Miss

## *THE GREAT DECISION*

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Marion Fortescue, "and when the season closes at our journey's end, dear, will we have that honeymoon cottage at Pass Christian?"

"With moonlight, mocking birds and magnolias," declared Clarence Cuddington Cotter.

(1)

THE END



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